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FANTASTIC Novels MAGAZINE

Vol. 4 MAY, 1950 No. 1

Novel

THREE AGAINST THE STARS.....**Eric North** 14

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Short Stories

A PRIEST OF QUICHE.....**Francis James** 88

Must he, step by step, repeat the evil life pattern of the ancestor whose face he wore?

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Strange creatures, bred of a freak of Evolution, they swarmed in their hidden lair and waited with preternatural cunning to close in upon the last sons of time. . . .

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MR. PRIMROSE GOES TO THE DEVIL.....
.....**William P. Templeton** 118

He reversed the ancient dishonorable pact with the devil, and took the punishment first and Paradise last.

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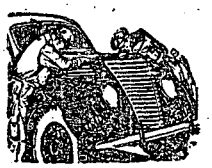

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WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Address comments to the Letter Editor, Fantastic Novels, New Publications, Inc., 205 E. 42nd St., New York 17, N. Y.

THE EDITOR'S GREETING

Dear Readers:

As I explained in the last issue of *Fantastic Novels*, there will be a few stories from the "later" Munsey collection, such as "Three Against the Stars" which is in this month. In the next—July—you will find "Earth's Last Citadel" by C. L. Moore and Henry Kuttner, with two or more classics of older vintage—among them "Death's Secret" by J. L. Schoolcraft, and "The Son of the Red God" by Paul L. Anderson. We will be glad to hear from you as to how the old and the newer stories stack up in your opinion.

The Moore-Kuttner fantastic novel was first published in the Argosy circa 1943, and was greatly liked by many readers.

It will be of interest to those who are not familiar with the name of J. L. Schoolcraft. "Death's Secret" is a very fine novelette, well remembered and often requested. It is set in Egypt and is both weirdly chilling and beautifully written.

"The Son of the Red God" is one of a series, which old-timers in the following of fantasy have insisted that we should publish.

It is a true-life story of conditions as they were before the beginning of history—and it is a very good one of this type.

Best wishes, and thanks for the many letters.

Yours in Fantasy,
Mary Gnaedinger

(Continued on page 8)

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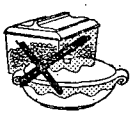

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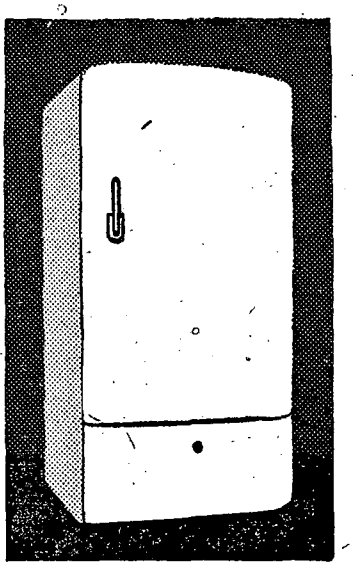

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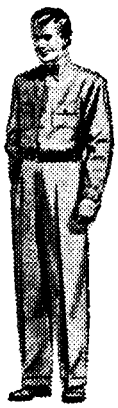

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FANTASTIC NOVELS

(Continued from page 6)

"LEGION" ONE OF OUR BEST

Dear Mary Gnaedinger:

Well, first off, congratulations for a new and successful year of publishing.

"The Flying Legion" by G. A. England was probably the best, for sheer adventure, that F.N. or F.F.M. has published in the last few years.

Of course, there are many flaws and mistakes in the plot, but the story was so excitng, so thrilling, that they didn't matter. One rousing adventure following another through 130 pages of fast action. I rank this above Merritt's yarns because it is more believable (huh!) the leading characters, I should say, are more believable.

Reviewing last year, I find (to my amazement) that the two outstanding tales were novelettes and written by the same master, Tod Robbins. I don't think anyone will agree on my selections, but each to his own taste. Below, I have each tale listed in preference.

1. "The Living Portrait". Tod Robbins. Superb, outstanding. One of the finest stories I have ever read in any field. Robbins has replaced Lovecraft, Smith, etc., in my favorite authors.
2. "The Toys of Fate" Robbins. Beautiful writing, superb plot, excellent handling. Please, please, please, more of Robbins' works in the near future.
3. "The Red Dust" Murray Leinster. A lot of fans will be angry with this, but the fact is, I enjoyed it more than Merritt's "Dwellers In The Mirage".
4. "The Dwellers In The Mirage", Merritt. I suppose this was great, but Merritt's heroes always seem to infuriate me. I dislike them intensely, but the powerful plot made up for these drawbacks.
5. "Seven Footprints to Satan" Merritt. Ditto.
6. Hmmmm. "Minos of Sardanes" Charles B. Stilson. Interesting. Same theme as "Dian of the Lost Land". No classic, though.
7. "The Eye of Balamok" by Rousseau. Good, but the others were better.
8. "The Golden Blight" England. Slightly old, but exciting.
9. "Devil Ritter" by Max Brand. Also a good story—simple but effective.
10. "Between Worlds" G. Smith. Off to the dull side, but did have its exciting moments.

I hope we have all the old classics reprinted in '50, as F.N. is undoubtedly the leading fantasy mag in the, shall we say, world? The author's works I would most appreciate is (you guessed it) Robbins. Also England, Smith, and Rousseau.

Oh, yes, now about the poem section? Just one page—this would be a great contribution to fantasy.

Let's have more of England's works in the near future. His tales have all I ask of any classic.

LARRY SAUNDERS.

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(Continued on page 10)

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(Continued from page 8)

TEN BEST F.N. STORIES

Although there are not many elements of fantasy in "The Flying Legion", it was one of the most absorbing tales published in the revived F.N. It is one of the most swiftly moving, yet well-written, adventure tales of the last half decade of pulp stories. It was vastly superior to the first G.A. England tale printed in F.N.

Now that F.N. has completed its second year, it seems fitting to list what I consider the best stories of those years.

As might be expected, the Merrittales are heading the list. "Ship of Ishtar", "The Moon Pool", "Conquest of the Moon Pool", "Dwellers in the Mirage", and "Seven Footprints to Satan" all by Merritt. "The Mad Planet" and "The Red Dust"—Leinster; "The Second Deluge"—Serviss; "Between Worlds"—Garret Smith; and "The Flying Legion"—George Allan England.

I'll match that list of ten stories against ten stories from any other mag for any two year period and bet that F.N. won't come off second best!

Undoubtedly, F.N. has done more to bring good fantasy to readers than any other mag in the four and one half years of my acquaintance with STF and fantasy. Look at the authors F.N. has featured—Merritt, Leinster, Max Brand, Giesy, Serviss, Garret Smith, Tod Robbins, England, etc.

Whoever suggested Francis Stevens's "Elf Trap" deserved a big pat on the back. It is one of those few shorts that the reader wishes were a novel; it haunts the reader with its magical lotus-land of dreams. It reminds one of Merritt's "Through the Dragon Glass," which is the best compliment I can think of for "Elf Trap".

Get Lawrence to paint more covers like the beautiful blonde for "Conquest of the Moon Pool" and also the one for "Dwellers in the Mirage".

In the future: let's have much more of Leinster, Max Brand, and England; also stories by Ray Cummings, O. A. Kline, Burroughs, Edmond Hamilton, E. E. Smith, Nelson Bond, and Francis Stevens.

Sincerely,
FRED R. PAYNE.

Box 845,
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Lexington, Kentucky.

READ "LEGION" FOUR TIMES

This is the first time I have ever written a magazine, but after reading (and rereading to date 4 times) your January classic, "The Flying Legion", I reckoned it was about time to break the ice. That masterful masterpiece was, to say the least, stupendous, out of this world, wonderful, marvelous, terrific, etc. (Furthermore it was good!!!) Where has George Allan England been all my life? It was undoubtedly the best piece of literature ever to appear in print in any fantasy magazine. Or, for that fact, any magazine whatsoever. When you stated on the cover of this issue (that, by the way, was terrif, also) that the story was incomparable, that, lady, was the understatement of the month. Keep up the good work.

I would also give my left eybrow to see you put into print some Thorne Smith!!! Such as his almost impossible to get "Dream's End."

Fantastically yours,
BUD BLACK.

Bon Air Plan #1,
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MORE POWER TO F.N.

I'm afraid my letter which was printed in the September issue sounded even sillier than it really was because of a typographical error. Of course, instead of "things" that failed to kill the hero of "Golden Blight" it should have been "thugs."

I'm sure we old-timers appreciate the new policy of putting the Merritt tales in a separate magazine and giving us the really old and scarce yarns in F.N. It's swell to have "Minos of Sardanes", the Garret Smith story, and "The Flying Legion." And now, "Man Who Mastered Time." It's a great story. I'd like to see Cummings' "Princess of the Atom" very soon.

Now we wait with bated breath to see what's coming next. If only we didn't have to wait two months for issues! How about going monthly? I can hardly wait for more stories by Stilson, Smith, England, McMorrow, Stevens, Giesy, Rousseau, Brent, and the much neglected Homer Eon Flint.

By all means keep up the Letter from the Editor and your excellent readers' column. And put Finlay back on a cover now and then.

More power to F.N. and to the old but ever-new Munsey yarns.

DONALD V. ALLGEIER.

1851 Gerrard Ave.,
Columbus 12, Ohio.

INTERESTING ANNOUNCEMENT

Egad! Wot's dis? You mean to stand there, dear editrix, and brazenly state that you purposely deleted our letter section for a long story? From here on, delete all stories for letters! Hmmm—ya say that ain't a good idea; ya say it wouldn't work? Tell ya wot I'm gonna do....On second thought, I won't...but there's no question of my *doing* somep'n drastic if deletions of steady departments are too oft' repeated.

However, I was very pleased in getting the Jan. ish of F.N. being that its contents carried a very long novel by one of the most erudite writers of STFantasy, namely, George Allan England, whom I personally consider as one of the great masters of *our type* of reading matter. Who can ever forget his unforgettable "Elixir of Hate", or the inimitable "Darkness and Dawn", "The Afterglow" or "Beyond The Great Oblivion", some of which were published in past F.F.M.s? Suggestions: Please see if you can also acquire England's "The Air Trust", for future publication if possible.

(Continued on page 12)

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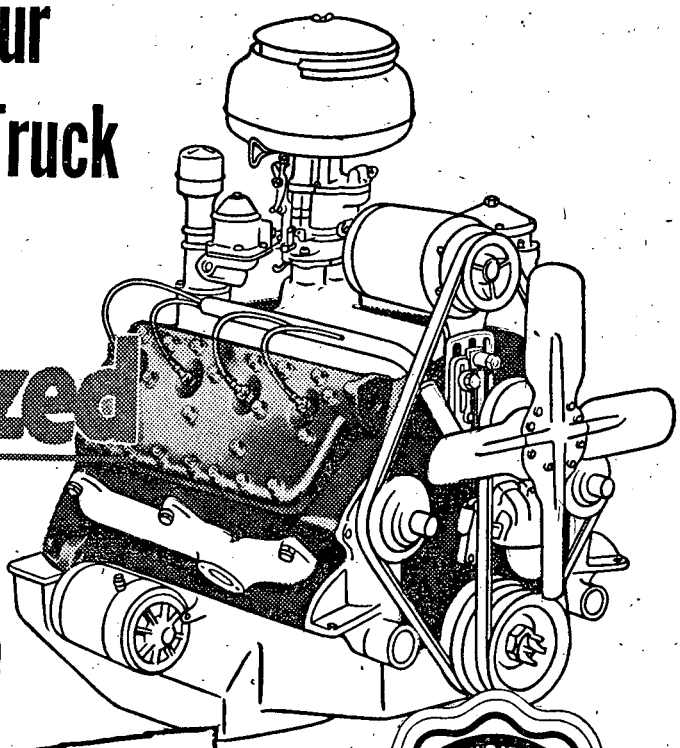

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(Continued from page 10)

Avoid H.R. Haggard, since you've already presented most of his best STFantasy works, while most of his other efforts bear very little resemblance to anything termed "scientifictional" or fantastic, though a recent bibliography has included all of his lesser works.

With a slight horror and shudders running through me, as if I were possessed of the ague (or "possessed" at least!) I note with sadness that you are slating for further production in the March F.N., none other than Ray Cummings' "The Man Who Mastered Time". Doubtlessly you've already perused over this story. So have I! I am sorry to say that he has overworked the *time-travel-machine* and "life-in-the-atom" yarns down to the bone and probably has presented as many variations and extrapolations of this theme than any one could show in a lifetime.

Print anything by him but the above theme, since he is a fine author and one of the best, but in *other things.*

It's probably unusual for you to get a letter commenting on a story prior to being read by the majority of the readers, but wot's the difference so long as we know wot it's all about, eh!

Hmmm—I'm still irked, ired and irritated over the fact that the letters from "What Do You Think?" were completel deleted due to the fact that you did not wish to snip, clip and cut any part of England's tale that would take the essence and pith away from it, which I fully acquiesce with you upon; but it so happens that I suspect one of my usually erudite and well-polished (...by glass-wax) epistles was missing.... Gnaaghh & ugh! It must not happen again, for our letter columns are the "eyes and ears" of your mags, and minus eyes and ears, wha' could hoppen? But in the future, here's another suggestion on not cutting a story, or part of a mag for lack of space. Expand!

Before concluding, I would like to carry a little announcement through to the other readers:

The members of the Science-Fantasy Society and myself would like to take this opportunity of asking any person who happens to have a collection of STFantasy magazines or books on hand to contact us if he/she wishes to dispose or sell his collection at a reasonable price, since we are attempting to build up as best a stock and supply of STFantasy literature that is possible for our organization. We are not interested in how large or small a collection would be as long as it's reasonable, since nothing is too small or large to carry over our supply and demand. Therefore, I would be very grateful to hear from anyone regarding the above, and promise to send an answer to every letter that I receive.

Also, fans—young and old—are welcome to write for particulars and data on joining our active organ, as we intend to make this the biggest and best yet turned out by fandom, and we ask for your support. And to avoid confusion, our old name was "Science Fantasy Correspondence Trading Club" which has been dropped for our new name, Science-Fantasy Society.

STFantasy and Fandom Forever,
Science—Fantasy Society,
CALVIN THOS. BECK, Director.

P.O. Box 1571,
Grand Central Station,
New York 17, N.Y.

"FLYING LEGION" EXCITING

Well, by Ghu, you've finally printed a thoroughly entertaining story! "The Flying Legion" was just about the best novel you have yet had—excepting the Merritt stories. "Legion" was colorful, adventurous, exciting, with just enough fantasy in just the right spots, to produce a splendid story. The style seemed a cross between the Bill Barnes stories, and Doc Savage, with finer developed characters than either.

Your news of the Cummings classic slated for the next issue was, to say the least, well-timed. Just the day before I picked up the magazine, I saw a copy of the book with the same title in a local back-number emporium and lacked the necessary coinage to get it. Then along comes the F.N. with it printed, for an eighth of the price! Now, *that* was well-timed! Thanks!!

I hope this gets in the letter dept. next ish, because I'd like to make use of your kind policy of printing want notices. Here's hoping: I want to hear from pipple with copies of Weinbaum's "New Adam"; Smith's "Out of Space and Time"; any books by Lord Dunsany; T. H. White's "Sword in the Stone"; the Chinese poetry anthology, "Lotus and Chrysanthemum"; copies of the fanzine *Acolyte, Fantasia,* or *Polaris;* Burton's translation of the "Kasidah of Haji Abdu"; and any books by Lafcadio Hearn. Anybody have them???

LIN CARTER.

1734 Newark St. So.,
St. Petersburg, Fla.

WANTS BIGGER F.N.

Egad!—now I'm getting five Popular Pubs zines each two months, whereas but a scant two years ago, it used to be one. Where will this trend cease? Will it be six in a few months; then seven, eight, nine....

Oh, well, to the current F.N. I'm glad you squeezed out the letter section; it reminded me of something. I want to beef about it.

I have in mind the perfect fantasy and/or s-f mag: 180 pages with small type like yours. They could print *twice* as much material, almost, even though the cost of the extra stories would bite into the profits somewhat. And you might write a longer "Letter from the Editor" and include within same the reply to these queries. Not, of course, that you will....

Well, let us hope that next issue there will be about twenty pages of readers' letters.

F.N. has been publishing good fantasy of late, such as "Between Worlds", "Minos of Sardanes", yes, and even "Dwellers in the Mirage",

(Continued on page 125)

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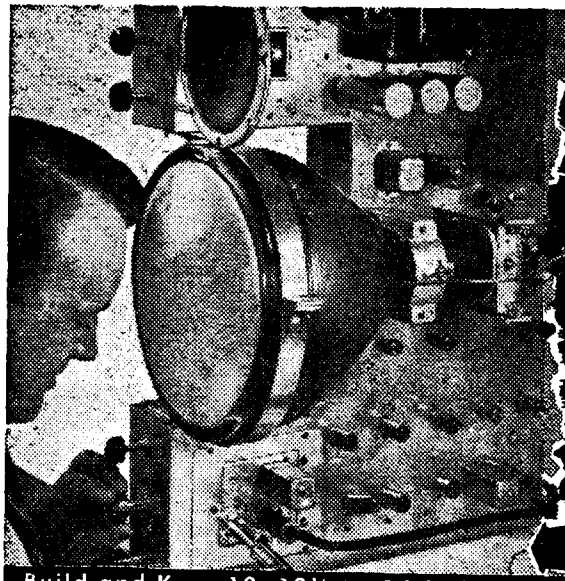

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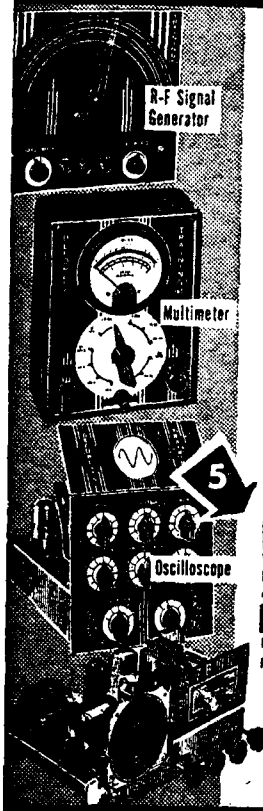

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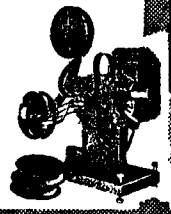

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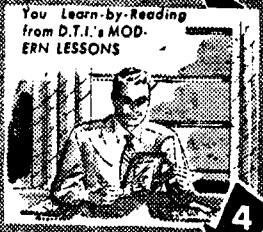

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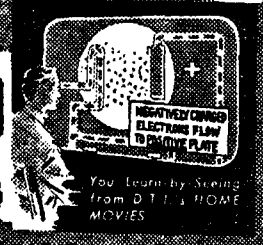

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THREE AGAINST THE STARS

CHAPTER I

IN STAR DUST, LIFE. . . .

THE Murgle family was at tea. Mr. Murgle, in shirtsleeves, sat at the head of the table, with an air of concentration which he always exhibited when in the presence of meat and drink. He was a small man, inclining to baldness, with a rust-colored mustache and rust-colored, inquisitive eyes. In professional circles he was a bricklayer's laborer, and something of the hue of the mortar wherein his working hours were embedded, was reflected in the pasty gray of his stubbled cheeks. He ate with gusto, dividing his attention between a plate of sausages and a huge cup of steaming tea.

Mrs. Murgle, anemic and melancholy, sat opposite. On her right were Joe and Jane, aged eighteen and sixteen respectively. On her left were the junior members of the family, Horace and Hermione. Horace was six years. Hermione claimed one whole year and some inconsiderable decimals over him. This minority, however, failed to detract from Hermione's sense of importance. Both precept and example suggested that the absence of a sausage from her own plate—an affair of cracked enamel, about whose circumference fled a succession of gnomes in tall hats—was in the nature of an affront. A hereditary love for sausages—Mr. Murgle would no more have gone without this daily fare than he would have denied himself sleep—was in the veins of all Murgles. Hermione expressed her displeasure by a loud monotonous wailing, to which Horace beat time with his cup and spoon, as it were, in sympathetic accompaniment. He was not without hopes of a second sausage, or the fraction thereof, for himself.

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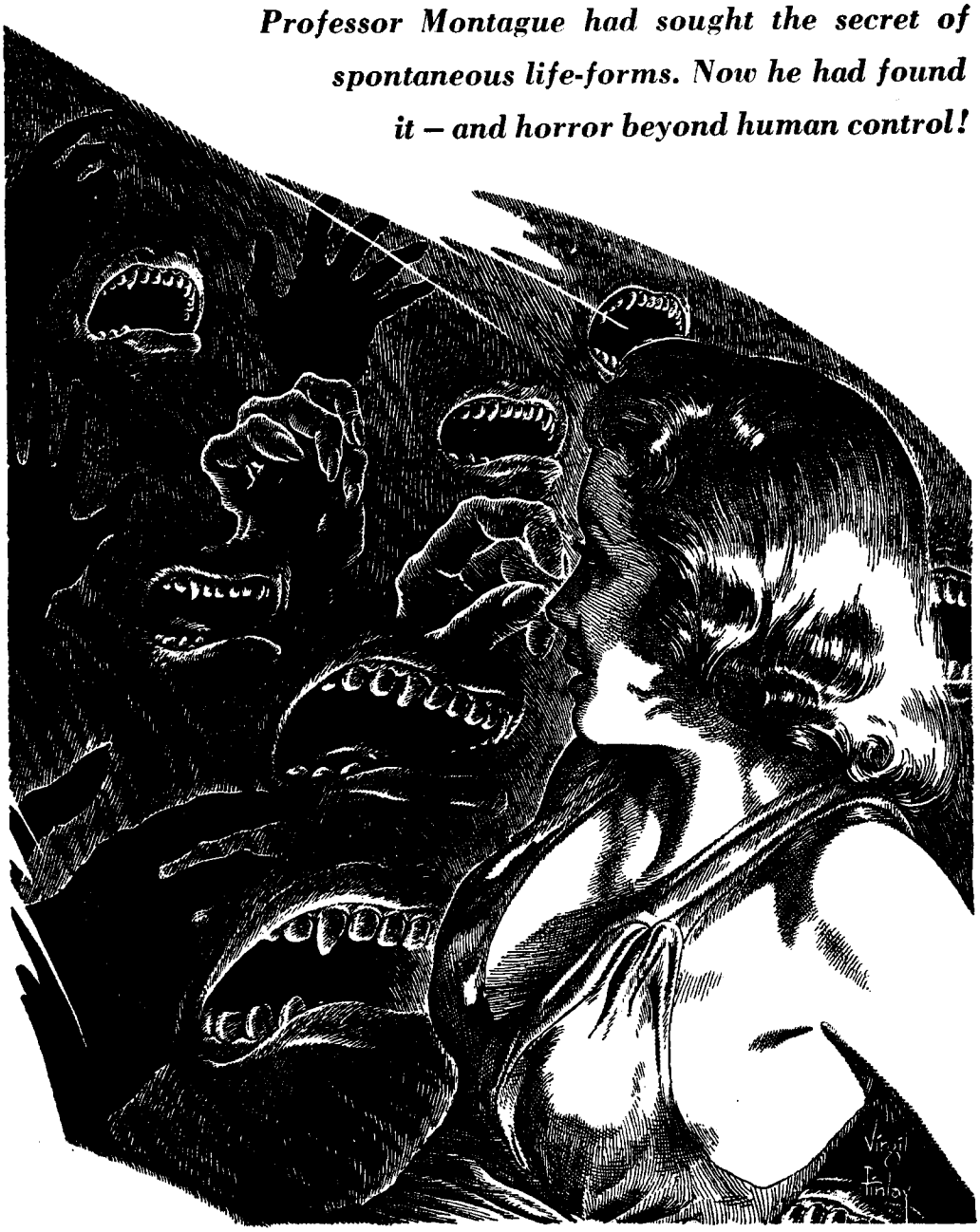
By Eric North

Life out of stardust – strange, menacing invaders from another world, growing and multiplying, ever more powerful, filling the earth with fear. All his days Professor Montague had sought the secret of spontaneous life-forms. Now he had found it – and horror beyond human control!



There were voices in the wind and hands in the obscurity. . . .

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Mr. Murgle—as he would himself have expressed it—had had a tiring day with the foreman. All foremen are unreasonable, and Mr. Murgle's foreman, goaded by a boil on the neck, had that day surpassed himself. Mr. Murgle's temper was in consequence a little raw. He frowned as he masticated.

Little Hermione's wails presently took on a livelier note. Her face, already smeared with tears and tapioca, assumed the dye of approaching suffocation. Mrs. Murgle, alarmed, made the peace offering of the section of sausage then being conveyed to her own mouth. With a dexterous motion the fork was diverted to the round, noisy cavern that was her youngest daughter. The uproar immediately subsided.

"Kids!" Mr. Murgle scowled. "Mouths to feed. That's all kids are."

This attempt at epigram was unrewarded. Mrs. Murgle retorted merely with bitterness:

"Well, if you didn't want 'em, you shouldn't have had 'em."

"Never had 'em," Mr. Murgle said.

The crude humor somewhat restored him. He thrust his plate aside and began to fill his pipe. His eye traveled from his wife along the line of his offspring, and rested speculatively upon the undistinguished features of his eldest.

"Reminds me. Got a job for Joe today. Starts tomorrer. Don't argue. I won't listen."

"Nobody's arguing," said Mrs. Murgle. "'Ermie, you keep quiet. Upset your cup again, 'Orace, and you'll feel the weight of me hand, so you will. Nobody's arguing, Bert."

"You're arguing now," said Mr. Murgle. He became, for the moment, concealed in smoke. His face presently reappeared to say, with a note of finality, "Time Joe did something, anyhow. I was his age I kep' me widdered old mother."

Joe Murgle, in mild resentment of the innuendo, said, "Well, I haven't got a widdered ole mother, have I? I've always wanted a job, only couldn't get one. Think I like loafing around?"

"Joe was in town all day, looking fer work," Mrs. Murgle told her husband defensively. "'Undreds of unemployed—'undreds and 'undreds. Pore things. What's the job, Father?"

"Place up in the 'ills," said Mr. Murgle. "They want a man for odd jobs. Quid a week and keep. I wrote up and there come this letter back."

HE PRODUCED a crumpled paper from some recess of his trousers, and flattened it on the table. Shielding his correspondence from the grubby, possessive hands of little Hermione, he began slowly to read aloud.

"Dear Sir: In reply to your application on behalf of your son, my father wishes me to say that he thinks the lad will be very suitable. We will expect him, then, on Thursday and hope that he will be happy in his employment. Yours faithfully, Ruth Montague."

Mr. Murgle said, "Thursday's termorrer."

"Who's her father?" Joe asked. His good-natured, rather foolish face, had lost its former sullenness. The prospect of having something to do brought to his eyes a mild animation. "What's he do?"

"He's this Dr. Montague," Mr. Murgle said.

"Think of that!" Mrs. Murgle exclaimed. "'Orace, you eat them crusts up. That'll be handy if Joe gets them pains again in 'is stomach."

Mr. Murgle stiffened. "He's not that sort of a doctor. He's what they call a man of signs."

"Signs!" Mrs. Murgle echoed. She rescued a table-knife from the gullet of little Hermione, as by a miracle. "What sort of signs? Advertising?"

"Don't be silly. I said he was a man of signs, didn't I? S-c-i-e-n-c-e—signs. Bugs and things."

"Oh, one of them," Mrs. Murgle said.

Joe was interested and excited. There was, when you thought of it, something vastly intriguing in being the adherent of a man of science. "And a pound a week. You're all right, Dad!"

Miss Murgle, breaking the cover of her hunger for the first time, said, "I know what they do. I've read about them. They boil you and count your bones and—and—things like that. And find germs and things. And talk to ghosts."

Her mother regarded her with admiration. "Jane, 'ow you do rattle on. Fancy your knowing that."

"I know more'n that," Miss Murgle said, tossing her head. "I do so. There was one of them had his photo in the papers the other day. It said he said he'd been getting letters from dead people—ghosts—"

"What's ghosts?" Horace demanded.

Jane eyed the small, freckled face maliciously.

"Nasty 'orrid things that come at you out of corners, and get under the bed."

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"Ooooh . . . ."

"—and make noises at you when you're alone. And pull your hair in the dark."

"'Ere, stop that, Jane!" Mrs. Murgle said hastily. "Go fright'ning everybody—"

"Cold wriggly things down your back—" Miss Murgle concluded disobediently. She found a fearful fascination in the convulsion of Horace's features. "Bits of jelly. . . ."

Horace exploded into a shocked bawling. Little Hermione, to whom uproar was spiritual sustenance, began to shriek in unison.

"Kids!" Mr. Murgle shouted. "Blasted noise—*will* you 'old your tongue, Jane?"

Under cover of all the commotion Joe Murgle slipped from the room. The chill of early autumn was in the air, and he caught up his hat and ragged overcoat as he went through the scullery into the open. He was scarcely conscious of the clamor persisting at his back. When he had gone a little way along the road—it could scarcely be called street—he lost little Hermione's terrified periods altogether.

The night was very quiet and self-absorbed. Lights dotted the darkness here and there, at wide, irregular intervals, marking other houses that took part in what the subdivisional plans described as "The Working Man's Residential Paradise." In the distance there was the long black shadow of the hills wound about the feet of the sky.

Joe stared at them, his mind saying: "There's where I'm going termorrer. I'll like that, too. Always did like the country. And mother needs the money."

He found a cigarette butt in the dust of a pocket, and lit it, with a sense of well-being pervading his stunted brain and body. His thoughts ran placidly. It was good to have work at last—any sort of work—good money, too—and working for a man of science. Not an ordinary kind of a job. No, sir. The sort of job where you could learn things. All sorts of queer things that other folks never even heard of. Important things. . . .

He was glad now—more than ever glad, that he had resisted his father's attempts to make him another bricklayer's laborer. He wasn't suited for that sort of thing. There was work and work. It wasn't the *and work* that he wanted. Everyone couldn't be a bricklayer's laborer. If it came to that, who *was* a bricklayer? What was a bricklayer as compared, say, to a man of science?

He wished he knew the life of a man of science as intimately as he knew the life of a bricklayer's laborer. He wondered if the household to which he was going held the equivalents of Horace and little Hermione. He thought probably not. Clever people weren't very keen on a lot of kids. Mouths to feed, as his father said. When he—Joe Murgle—was married, there weren't going to be too many mouths—

He found another cigarette butt.

All rot, anyhow, what Jane said. Bugs and things; but not ghosts. Silly! Flapper talk. Everybody knew there weren't such things. And as for boiling you and counting your bones—Jane was always going on like that. She loved to scare Horace. Ghosts! He pondered derisively. Things from another world. How could things from another world get into this world? Would somebody answer him that? And don't all speak at once.

He screwed his head so that he could look at the sky. Stars—millions and billions of stars. . . .

That was what men of science did. They found out things about the stars. He didn't quite see how they did it, but there you were. They knew as much about stars as his father knew about bricks. They even told you there was quite likely life of some kind in some of the stars. Not the sort of life that the earth had, but—well, life, anyway. He knew that, because he had read about it. It was the one thing he really liked to read about. Stars, sure; and bricks. Any amount of both. But not ghosts.

THERE were no more cigarette butts. Assured of this fact, and also of the growing chill of the night, Joe retraced his steps. Horace and little Hermione had been put to bed. Mr. Murgle, his feet on the chimney, was reading the paper. Mrs. Murgle struggled with a tremendous rent in a shirt which Joe recognized as his own. Jane Murgle was at the table, nodding over her sums.

"Where you been?" Mr. Murgle demanded.

But he did not look up from his paper. Indeed, it was evident that if asked to repeat the words, he would have denied having spoken at all. His was the mechanical utterance born of long repetition. As such Joe ignored it. His attention was, in fact, wholly upon the occupation of his mother. An old leather trunk was open on the floor by her chair, and her lap was a litter of garments.

Joe said, "Of course. I got to get packed up. You won't forget my new dungarees, mum? Listen—I'll send the money down to you regular."

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He stood at the back of her chair, his hands pressing her shoulders affectionately. Mrs. Murgle, with a quick glance at her preoccupied husband and daughter, drew his hands passionately into her own. Her eyes held the furtive half-fear of the mother whose son, for the first time, goes to live among strangers.

"You'll write, Joe? Where is it you're going to? But you'll be sure to write, won't you?"

"On Sunday," Joe promised. "And I'll be home now and again, when I can get away. Where is it? Dad never said. Where is it, Dad?"

"Eh?" Mr. Murgle said.

He said, pursuing his own thought, "It says 'here in the old days a bricklayer could lay his seven hundred bricks a day with ease. Slavery—that's what I call it. Seven hundred—"

"Joe wants to know where he's going," Mrs. Murgle intruded upon this tribute to unionism. "Where does this Dr. Montague live? And what about the fare?"

"Train to Great Oaksbury, and then walk," Mr. Murgle said. He was still seething gently. Seven hundred bricks, indeed! "The name of the 'ouse is Red Gates. And you see you keep the job. It's 'ard enough—"

Joe said good-naturedly, "I know. But I'll want some money for the fare."

"All right. I 'eard you," Mr. Murgle said. With reluctance he produced some scattered coin and slowly counted it out into his wife's palm. He grumbled, "When I was a lad your age I never asked nobody for no fare. If I couldn't pay me own way, I walked. And me keeping your grandmother Murgle, too."

"I'll pay it back," Joe said.

"Time enough when you're asked," Mr. Murgle said.

He resumed his paper, with much coughing and rustling.

"If you make that noise," Jane complained, raising an exasperated face, "how can I do my work? What with the row Horace and Hermie are always making—"

"*Your* work!" Mr. Murgle said, astounded.

"Well, how would you like to have to do it? I can't hear myself think."

"Perhaps," Mr. Murgle suggested, "you'd like me to clear out and go to bed?"

"Since you ask me," said his daughter, "I would. You're just as comfortable there, and you can go to sleep without any upset. Look at the blots you've made me do."

Mr. Murgle, refusing the invitation, rose heavily to his feet. Had one of his own bricks been dropped upon him, he could not have displayed more annoyance. He felt, for the moment, that even the company of the foreman with the boil was preferable to that of this flaxen-haired opponent. Jane at her lessons was a match for most people. When roused she had courage and wit.

"I don't want to look at no blots. Kids! Hunt a man out of his own home, that's what they do. I'm going down to the billiard saloon. Get a bit of peace there."

But before he went, Mr. Murgle shook hands awkwardly with Joe.

He said, "I'll be gone before you're up. Well, if the job ain't right, come back 'ome. So long, Joe."

"So long," Joe said.

Mr. Murgle hesitated, then departed.

Mrs. Murgle said feebly, "You hadn't ought to talk like that, Jane. Such a bad example for Horace and little Hermie."

"They're in bed and asleep," said Jane.

"But they ain't always," Mrs. Murgle said.

"No, but they ought to be," Jane told her.

Her tongue, lolling between pink lips, proclaimed a return to her copybook labors.

Seeing the helplessness of his mother against this pertness, Joe entered a mild remonstrance.

"What cheek," he said.

"You run along to your old ghosts," Jane said.

"There you go again," Joe exclaimed. "Silly nonsense."

He began to help his mother with the packing. There was, after all, very little of that. It was the mending that took the time. Raggedy things. Time he found work, indeed.

He said presently, "I'll be going to bed. Funny to think I won't be here tomorrow night. Only been away from home when I've been doing my drill in camp—"

He went to sleep almost the moment his head touched the pillow. He dreamed a good deal through the night. Perhaps some premonition touched him, for he dreamed, once, absurdly, that he was a man of science himself, engaged in a terrible struggle with a tremendous star. In some way that his dreaming did not understand, he knew that the star was full of ghosts—a world of ghosts. Only not exactly ghosts, so much as things—creatures. He was throwing bricks at them, as hard as he could. . . .

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AS RODNEY KING walked up the weed-grown drive of Red Gates, he paused —as he invariably had done, ever since a first acquaintance—to admire the superb view. The house rose almost sheer on the brink of a deep ravine. From there, the ground fell sharply in turn, in a series of green hills and shallow, blue-shadowed valleys. It was this view, more than anything, that accounted for his purchase, a year before, of a small cottage on a slope of the hills. Rod King was a free lance writer of tolerable fiction. Blessed with a small but permanent income, he was able to indulge his passion for rural surroundings.

At first he had been often bored and lonely. The district was scattered and immediate neighbors were few. Red Gates had been vacant for some years, despite the altogether delightful outlook. King visited it frequently. The house was easy of access and in course of time he became familiar with every nook and corner of the old building. The view from the square, stone tower he found particularly alluring.

His interest had been great, one day, to discover that Red Gates had at last found a tenant. Thus definitely his boredom and loneliness vanished. A neighborly call upon the newcomers resulted in the friendly relations he had hoped for. He became a privileged caller at Red Gates. It is true he saw but little of Dr. Montague himself, for the old gentleman —old, that was to say, in the sense of erudition only, for he was scarcely past middle age—was almost invariably at work in the laboratory which he had established soon after his arrival. Of what this work consisted, King had but the vaguest notion.

His curiosity here was overshadowed by the greater attraction of Ruth Montague, a lively girl a year or two younger than himself. King had been instantly enslaved by her abundant character and nimble mind. Her features were, perhaps, too irregular for good looks. Her charm was principally in her expression and manner. Her eyes were frank and fearless, and full of the light and shade of her thought. She was entirely without affectation. King admired her devotion to her father, whose love for science she reflected with astonishing capability. Indeed, Dr. Montague had confessed to him that her help in his research work was invaluable.

King had known them for some time before it occurred to him to wonder why the doctor chose so isolated an environment in which to carry out his experiments.

The household included a housekeeper and a kind of serving man. In the rambling pile of Red Gates these four were almost negligible in point of occupied space. There were, as King had discovered in his early exploration of the building, exactly twenty rooms, large and small, apart from the tower and landing. Of these, some half dozen were now in use. The huge vacuum of the unoccupied remainder, emphasized by contrast, was pretty depressing, he thought. It was eerie and—suggestive of unquiet things.

As he walked on, now, to the entrance door under the crumbling porch, King knew an unusual sense of nervousness. He was, upon the whole, self-contained enough in general. Today this assurance suffered from the spur of doubious conviction. When one has a special mission to perform, self-consciousness is keyed to its uttermost. King knew his own mind exactly; had, in fact, known it for many days. The wisdom of declaring it, however, was not so apparent.

A figure appeared casually around a corner of the building, as King approached. He had an irritable impression of a weedy, tow-haired youth, carrying a bucket and a large lump of cloth. With these impediments the youth began a leisurely attack upon a window, whistling the while with astonishing tunefulness.

King was admitted by Ruth Montague herself. She wore a neat blue linen smock over her skirt and jumper, and the hand she extended was curiously mottled.

She said, smiling, "It's only acid-stain. I've just been helping father mount some slides. Come into my sitting-room. You can smoke while I clean up. You're just in time for tea."

King followed her into a small, cozily furnished room opening off the end of the hall. There was a thick carpet underfoot, and the walls displayed one or two well-chosen etchings. In one corner was an open bookcase. There were a couple of easy chairs and a small divan.

"Who's the lad cleaning the windows?" King asked, as he sat down.

"I wondered if you'd notice him. That's our new laboratory assistant. His name is Joe Murgle. He only came yesterday, but already I've lost my heart. Rod, he's really the funniest thing. I wouldn't have missed him for worlds."

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"Laboratory assistant?" King said.

"Father wanted someone to do the chores, in the laboratory. Sweeping and tidying things up, and so on. And, behold —Joe Murgle. I've decided to call him laboratory assistant. It's ever so much more important-sounding than handyman. That would be a misnomer, anyway. Anything more unhandy than Joe would be hard to to find. Already he's broken a scullery window and three test tubes. But he's so very ingenuous and in earnest that even Mrs. Puckett couldn't be brutal. Find yourself a book."

He preferred, however, to walk about the room. When Ruth came back, he was standing by the window, staring out at the line of gum-trees beyond the garden.

She exclaimed, as he turned, "Why, how serious you look. Isn't the novel going well?"

"As a matter of fact," King said, "I haven't touched it for over a week. I don't even remember what it's all about. I'm not sure that I care."

"You're not ill, Rod?"

The concern in her voice encouraged him. He took her two hands in his own. His voice came a little strangely.

"Not that way, Ruth. Look here—I'm crude enough, God knows, but the right words won't always come. Will you marry me?"

"Rod, I'm so sorry—I was afraid it was this."

"You mean you won't?"

She released her hands gently.

"I mean—I don't know. Oh, Rod, I wish you hadn't. I just wanted to be friends."

"Well, but you might later," he said. She was more than ever desirable. "I can't pretend friendship, when it's love I want."

"That's what I can't be sure of," she told him. "And I want to be very sure. I like you awfully. . . ."

"Like!" he said scornfully.

Ruth refused to accept his tragic pose. Her face cleared to a sudden ripple of laughter. "Why, you don't know anything about me. Rod, how very absurd. How can you want to marry a girl you've only known for a month?"

"Six weeks."

"Well, six weeks. How can you—"

"Lots of men do."

"Besides, I've a fearful temper. And I'm a rotten cook. And I talk in my sleep—"

"You needn't make a joke of it," he said, with dignity. "At least I'm in earnest—"

She saw that he was hurt, and she sobered instantly.

"I do like you—and respect you. Sometimes I have wondered if I loved you. You see, Rod, I can't be sure. If you were patient with me for just a little longer. . . ."

"I'll wait till Hell cools, if you like," he said, with the exaggeration born of his sudden hope. "Ruth, you will try? It shouldn't be so hard."

"Conceit!" she said.

BUT his boyish grin was hard to resist. After all, he was a dear. She wished she could find courage to take her own love by the forelock, as it might be, and share these present day rather unmanly attributes more intimately. She wondered at herself that she could not. She wondered what was lacking in him, or in herself, that she could not. Not just then, at all events. In spite of herself, her lip quivered.

King asked wistfully, "What do you think would make up your mind—make you love me, perhaps?"

She considered this.

"I think if you were in any danger—if I saw you threatened with hurt—Rod, I think I should know then. I'm sure I should know, then."

"That's not a very likely contingency, is it?" he said, a little stiffly. "You won't let this make any difference, Ruth? We can forget it—in a sort of way. D'you think it would be wrong of me to pray for danger?"

"Don't be foolish," she said sharply. "Of course I didn't mean that—not really. I'd hate you to be in any danger. Here is Mrs. Puckett with the tea."

As by common consent, when the housekeeper had withdrawn, they began to talk of other things.

"Father's quite excited—or as near to excitement as I've ever known him—today," Ruth said. Her own eyes were sparkling. "I don't quite understand, myself, but he has discovered something of importance. Something he has been striving over for years. Or, at least, he thinks he has."

"What line of research is he undertaking?" King asked. "Queer. Until this moment I hardly gave it a thought. And he never talks about it."

Ruth said seriously, "He's fairly sensitive, you know. It's quite understandable. The average person has no interest whatever in science, and is inclined to sneer

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at those who have. It's supposed to be a dry-as-dust business. In reality it's the most fascinating thing in the world. Particularly when it touches metaphysics."

"'The science of being.' King nodded. "First principles of nature and thought. What is he after, Ruth?"

She gave him a second cup of tea before she answered. Her forehead wrinkled. "I know so very little, Rod. You've heard, I expect, of attempts to create life in the laboratory? The newspapers gave a lot of space to it at one time. That is what father has been at for years and years. The origin of life. Seeking for spontaneous generation. It has always been found that a bacterium cannot be produced artificially because it is too highly organized. All the same, people keep on trying. It's uncanny, when you think of it. Old Aristotle, you remember, thought that eels and frogs were evolved by spontaneous generation."

"How's it done? The experimentation, I mean?" King asked.

Ruth shrugged her shoulders. "Lots of ways. If we can get father in a good mood he'll explain it to you, very likely. He's so jealous of his precious cultures that I wouldn't dare suggest that you be shown over the laboratory. . . . All kinds of ways, Rod. Radium and chloride salts. Do you know what radiobes are? Father thinks they're elementary bacilli, the first beginnings of life. They're the product of radium on bouillon—that's a sort of soup. The radiobes grow on it. I've watched them lots of times. You've no idea of the funny feeling it gives you to see those tiny specks coming out of nothing—as far as you can tell—and turning into dots and dumbbells, and then like frogs' spawn. Sometimes they divide and resolve into crystals. And, only that the crystals will dissolve in water, you could easily believe them to be bacteria."

King said admiringly, "By Jove, Ruth, you're a scientist yourself. No wonder your father can't do without you. . . . So that's what he does?"

"Yes, but other things as well. Rod, it's frightfully involved, but— I just can't explain it, somehow. For years, you see, father went on those lines alone. But nobody ever got past a certain stage there. Just groping in the dark, in a sort of half-belief that there may be some more elementary form of life than bacteria. Father got very discouraged. He couldn't find

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—no one ever has—the gap between the organic and the inorganic world, except that it seemed to be bridged in part by radio-organic organisms, like cyanogen. This seems to give just a clue to the beginning and the end of life, as we know it.

"And then one day—we were in Chelsea, then—father trailed off on a trip abroad. He wouldn't say what he was after and, knowing him, I didn't ask. I stayed with some aunts while he was away, and was thoroughly miserable. I loved helping him with his experiments, and when they ceased I was like a fish out of water. I'm sure my aunts thought I was the moodiest creature alive.

"Anyway, father turned up again at the end of a year, and we came to Great Oaksbury and to Red Gates. He told me he'd been climbing all the high mountains he could get at, getting samples of star dust. He was working on a new theory, you see. Dr. Reichenback many years ago collected some of this dust, though for quite other reasons. He analyzed it and found it contained identically the elements which are found in meteoric stones—nickel, cobalt, iron, and phosphorous. They've even got this dust out from the bottom of the sea. Father calls it cosmical dust."

KING'S imagination was stirred. But as yet it could not discover a sequence. He said, "What has this to do with evolving life?"

"Father brought this dust home with him," Ruth said. For a second she paused, as though weighing his expression. "Rod, he had the extraordinary theory that it might contain some form of life from the stars beyond. Life in embryo—whatever you like to call it. He thought that this inorganic substance might contain in it some germ hitherto unknown, and of a nature distinct from any we on earth have reason to regard as living. Vital processes in an elementary form, manifesting radioactivity. It's dreadfullly difficult to explain, particularly since I'm far from understanding it myself. There's a name—biogenesis. All living matter has sprung from preexisting matter, is the gist of it. That's father's theory here—that this cosmical dust, or star dust, contains preexisting matter."

"You mean he's trying to hatch out some kind of star life?" King said in amazement.

He remembered afterward how grave Ruth's face suddenly became. If he had not known her, he might even have thought that the sudden widening of her eyes was due to fear.

"Not trying, Rod." He heard her breath catch. "He thinks he's done it. They—Something that was not there before came today. Nothing to be *seen*. Not even with the microscope. But something, just the same. Something you can *feel*. Rod, I don't know that I altogether like it. It's—in a way, it's wicked. But father's almost insane with delight. I don't mind confessing that I tried to persuade hm to destroy the cultures. He refused, of course. He said I was perfectly idiotic to suggest such a thing."

"But those other things—what did you call them? Radiobes. They never came to anything, did they? I mean, they fizzled out. Mightn't the star germs do the same?"

"I wish they would, Rod."

"I'm afraid I don't understand how it's possible to evolve life in that manner," he said. "But I can understand how interesting the attempt would be. In any case, what exactly is star dust?"

"I can tell you that, anyhow," Ruth smiled. "In a year, the earth encounters as many as 400 millions of meteors, according to high authority. If these reached the ground in solid form, they would decimate the globe. As it fortunately happens, the resistance of the air vaporizes all but the largest of them, before they have penetrated even the outermost atmospheric layers. They are turned into vapor and fall to earth as dust."

King suddenly recollected. "By Jove, that reminds me. In Bacon's description of the sweating sickness in his Life of Henry the Seventh, he says that the disease was thought by some to be not an epidemic disease but to come out of the air under extra-terrestrial influences. A sort of malign vapor. It's a rum idea to think we may sometimes be breathing matter from another world."

"Here's father, now," Ruth said.

Dr. Montague came in briskly. "Well, King. Glad to see you. Tea over, Ruth?"

"I hear you've made something of a discovery, Doctor," King said.

"Yes and no," the older man replied. "It doesn't do to be too optimistic, King. I try to keep myself wtihin safe limits. And yet—undoubtedly some form of life is manifesting itself. Ruth has been telling you, then, about our work?"

His tone was a little anxious, and King made haste to reassure him.

"You can trust me to keep my own counsel, Doctor. I know how rigorously scien-

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tific secrets are kept. You must feel tremendously pleased."

He was finding a new admiration for his host, and he studied afresh the alert face, with its sharp, clever features. Montague was tall and gaunt, and carried himself with a slight stoop. His moods, as King knew, were strangely varying. He could be intensely practical or almost childishly vague; calm and decisive or excited to a degree.

"Rod would like to see the cultures, Father," Ruth said. "Do you think he might?"

Dr. Montague looked sharply at King.

"I don't know . . . . The point is, King, the operation is one of the utmost delicacy. The tiniest variation of temperature— And yet, why not? Yes, I think you might. In a sense, though, you won't gain much. Nothing to see, you know, but a few specks."

"Specks!" Ruth exclaimed. "But I couldn't see a thing an hour ago. Neither could you."

She stared at her father.

Dr. Montague said, with ridiculous complacency, "As you say, an hour ago. But now there is something to see. A most remarkable development. Possibly you will witness the first beginnings of life, King. I might even say, alien life. On the other hand, they may be merely unintelligible germs which will fail to adapt themselves. At this stage, it is impossible to say. Undoubtedly there is metabolism, and without metabolism there can be no life."

"These technical terms—" King grinned, as they rose.

IT WAS not until Mr. Murgle had finished his tea that Mrs. Murgle, emerging from her anemic melancholy, alluded to the supreme event of her day. From the pocket of her apron, she produced a crumpled envelope.

She said, with a hint of tearfulness, "Letter came from Joe this evening, Father."

"Eh!" said Mr. Murgle.

He would have said more, but that Horace, reminded of the loss of an elder brother, spontaneously ignited in grief. He began to bawl.

"Want Joe—"

"'Orrie!" Mrs. Murgle admonished.

"Want Joe to come 'ome—"

Little Hermione, thoroughly approving the uproar, without the least understanding it, prepared for whole-hearted coöperation. Her eyes and her mouth became widening circles of woe. As Mrs. Murgle hastily sought for an antidotal tidbit, Hermione's anguish became suddenly and piercingly audible.

Mr. Murgle banged his fist on the table. He said fiercely, "Kids—noise—man can't even have peace in his own home. Clip his ear!"

"Jane," Mrs. Murgle shrilled, "you take the children to play on the path. 'Ermie, I'll smack you."

"I've got to do my natural history," Miss Murgle demurred. "Why don't you put them to bed? Always howling."

"You do as you're told," said Mr. Murgle. "You 'owled yourself, once—more noise than any of 'em. Don't you argue, because I won't 'ave it."

He lit his pipe noisily, watching her sullen departure with little Hermione packed under her arm, like a parcel. Horace, a trifle dazed, but not silent, as the result of a sisterly box on the ear, tottered in the rear. With the slamming of the back door, comparative quiet ensued.

"Bloody row!" Mr. Murgle said, leveling his pipe with a mortared forefinger. "Joe's wrote, has he? Got the sack already? I know. You needn't tell me."

Mrs. Murgle denied this plaintively. "He's not. He's doing fine. You can read for yourself."

"Give it 'ere," Mr. Murgle said.

He spread the half dozen or so sheets of letter-pad on the table and scowled at them.

"He's wrote a book, not a letter," he grumbled.

"Joe always could write a fine 'and," Mrs. Murgle said. Her pride was roused. "Joe's a good scholar. That boy'll be something in the world before he's done. You mark me."

She wagged her head.

"You *will* argue," Mr. Murgle said.

He drew heavily at his pipe, and commenced to read.

Dear Mum—

I like this place. I wish you could see it. It's a great big house and a lot of ground around it and a big tower at one end. I mean to climb up into the tower one day and see what's there. But I'll go in the daytime because it's a spooky-looking thing. You get plenty to eat here, mum, lots more than you get at home. Mrs. Puckett—that's the housekeeper—is a nice lady. And the man that does the garden is all right. His name's Fry. Him and me sleep in a room off the stables at the back with a fireplace in it, and it was cold last night so we had a fire. I

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think Mr. Fry drinks because I smelled him when he came to bed and he was like father smells when he comes back from the billiard saloon.

Mr. Murgle, turning a page, looked stonily at the wall. Only a faint movement of his rust-colored mustache bespoke his passionate resentment of this unfilial comment.

Miss Montague's name is Ruth. She isn't pretty but I like her because she smiles at a fellow. I broke a window yesterday by accident and she only said, "Careless boy." And Mrs. Puckett who is a very big widow lady only said, "You must be more careful." So I think they like me. Mrs. Puckett is about seventy I should say her hair is gray and she is fat. Miss Ruth has a lot of brown hair and her eyes are brown. She is very clever too I think because I heard her talking a lot to a Mr. King who is a writer and wants to keep company with her. But she said no not just yet. I was cleaning a window where they were talking and they did not see me but I saw them. And so I could not help hearing what they were talking about. And then they talked about stars and things like that a good deal. And then Dr. Montague came in and Fry called me to help him with some work he was doing.

"What part have you got to?" Mrs. Murgle asked, as Mr. Murgle turned another page. "Such a lot of writing. But Joe was always a one for writing. He's like my own father that once wrote something for the newspapers only they forgot to print it. Dad said they were jealous of him."

Mr. Murgle, ignoring this family history, read on. It seemed to Mrs. Murgle that his face was unusually purple, and she racked her short memory anxiously in an effort to recall if Joe had written anything his father might not like.

Mum, Mr. King is about thirty with brown hair and eyes like Miss Ruth. He shows his teeth when he laughs which is not often because he is in love with her and she won't say she will marry him until she is sure. Both he and Dr. Montague are clean-shaven but Fry is not. Mrs. Puckett is always at Fry to take his whiskers off because she says whiskers are dirty things, especially a mostarch like father has. But Mr. Fry says his whiskers are doctor's orders because he has a weak throat and chest. Has father a weak throat and cheet? Anyhow nobody grows a mostarch now. Mrs. Puckett says because the girls don't like it, especially her neece Emily who is in service at a place near Red Gates. Emily comes to see her aunt that is Mrs. Puckett on Sundays and so I am looking forward to seeing her."

A strangled sound escaped Mr. Murgle. He pursued his task, however, to the bitter end. Safely negotiating two blots and the impression of an inkstained thumb, he came to his conclusion.

Dr. Montague is very fussy about his labortry which is the place where he does things. I am not to go into it he says or he will be very angry. And so I have not been in it yet because the door is always locked when he is not there or Miss Ruth, but I thought I would clean a sort of skylight in the seeling and I could look through and see a lot of bottles and things. I would have seen more only Mr. Fry said, "What are you doing up there? Come down at once, you young devil, that skylight doesn't want cleaning." Well, mum, that is all the news. Give my love to Jane and Horrie and Hermie and could you send up the pocketknife Uncle George gave me for Xmas? Jane knows where it is. Tell father I am making good on my new job.

Your loving son,

Joe.

"Well?" Mrs. Murgle said timidly.

Mr. Murgle's expression was not encouraging. He cleared his throat several times before he spoke.

"More time to waste than I 'ad when I was a boy. That's all I got to say."

Mrs. Murgle sighed. She could think of nothing to say but, "Joe always was a one for writing."

She rose presently and went to the door. She called, "Jane, it's time the children were put to bed. You come in and get your lessons done. Then if you're good I'll let you read Joe's letter."

"I read it while you were getting tea," said Miss Murgle. "It fell out of your apron. That Fry is a trick, isn't he? Horace, don't you pull Hermie's hair like that."

CHAPTER II

THE THING IN THE LABORATORY

IN SPITE of Dr. Montague's mild warning that his research at this stage could offer little of visible interest to the layman, King was instantly intrigued by the atmosphere of the laboratory. Anything of the kind was new to him and he was surprised at the comparative simplic-

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ity of the equipment. The room—as he must have guessed—even if Ruth had not told him—had originally comprised a large and roomy conservatory.

It was roughly some twenty feet long and fifteen feet wide. The glass walls had been replaced by walls of brick, but the flat glass roof had been retained. This roof was unusually high, being at least fifteen feet from the ground level. The iron pipes of the conservatory heating system, fed from a huge boiler in the nearby kitchen, ensured an even, comfortable warmth. Each wall contained two square glass windows operating upon tiny rollers, by which means they could be slid in and out of slots in the masonry. They were furnished with outside shutters and inside blinds. The floor was of concrete, upon which was laid strips of coil matting. Overhead blinds, worked by pulleys, adjusted the light from the roof.

King found most interest, however, in the equipment of retorts, tubes, and the whatnot of scientific apparatus. He was reminded to some extent of a photographic studio. A camera, in fact, rested upon a tripod in one corner, and there was a sink and a drying rack. Close to one window was a small table on which was set a microscope. Shelves were everywhere littered with jars and bottles and paraphernalia of all kinds. Exactly at the center of the room was a narrow bench-table holding a flat glass case. To this Dr. Montague drew attention.

King saw therein a number of glass tubes plugged at one end with cotton wool, and suspended by tiny slings of silver wire. The under part of the case, he saw, was resting upon small springs set at each of its four corners. Strips of paper pasted upon the glass lid of the case, immediately over the suspended test tubes, were labeled, "Alpha," "Beta," "Gamma," "Delta," and so on, in Greek alphabetical sequence.

Dr. Montague carefully lifted the lid, exposing the test tubes. He handed King a small magnifying glass.

"Look at the first culture. Avoid contact with the bench. I find that the least unbalance reacts unfavorably. The cultures are in groups, as you see, according to the principle involved in the experiment. The groups alpha, beta, gamma, for example, represent cultures relating respectively to biogenesis, abiogenesis, heterogenesis, and so on."

Ruth, sensing King's confusion at these terms, came to his assistance.

"Father means by biogenesis, Rod, the hypothesis that all living matter has sprung from pre-existing living matter. Abiogenesis supposes the production of living matter from dead matter. Heterogenesis means spontaneous generation."

Dr. Montague said impatiently, "Of course King knows all that. You're looking at radiobes, King. We know no more than that they are molecular aggregations of a highly complex matter. Now this one. Chloride salt on a gummed slide. Here now. The action of potassium ferrocyanide on gelatin. It bears a resemblance in appearance to the unit forms of life, but that would appear to be all. In some of these we get metabolism, but something more is required before we get what we call life."

Ruth interpreted, "Metabolism means integration and disintegration."

"To be sure," her father exclaimed. It was evident that the luxury of having an entirely unsophisticated listener was beginning to impress him. His eyes sparkled, and he rubbed his hands together ecstatically. "Butschli of Heidelberg obtained subdivisions by the action on soluble salts of such substances as olive oil. I did something of the same, myself, some years ago. This form of research is more varied than the world supposes. What does it know of Lehmann's liquid crystals or the eobes of Dubois? No doubt you remember that Loeb of California produced artificial parthenogenesis in the eggs of sea urchins?"

"No doubt he does nothing of the sort," Ruth retorted with amusement. "Really, Father—"

Dr. Montague frowned, then laughed.

"No doubt you are right. One is apt to forget—"

King asked, "What are radiobes?"

"Bodies having a chemical behavior which is in striking resemblance to that of living protein," Dr. Montague told him. "They first originated in the theory of Pfluger of Bonn, that cyanogen was probably the origin of living things. What is life? Shall we say a specialized mode of motion? Von Schron of Naples held that everything in nature either lives or has lived. On the other hand—"

"Rod would like to see the star germ cultures," Ruth interrupted gently. She made a little face at King, as if to say, "Once father gets started on his hobby—I warned you, you know."

"Upon my word!" Dr. Montague began. But her smile disarmed his irritation. He said, "Certainly, King. That was what you

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really came to see. They're in the group labeled 'stigma.' You see—"

HE BROKE off abruptly, and it seemed to King that his jaw sagged. He had the appearance of a man utterly bewildered. When he spoke, his voice was hoarse with sudden anger. "Who has done this? Ruth!"

She hastened to his side. "Done what, Father? Why—whatever has happened?"

King, peering over her shoulder, saw with concern that four of the six tubes were broken. Smashed, perhaps, was the better word, for glass was scattered everywhere upon the bed of the case. It looked almost as though the tubes had been, in some extraordinary manner, exploded.

Dr. Montague was shaking with anger.

"I locked the door myself," Ruth said. She had gone white. "It's impossible that anyone could have been in the laboratory. And, besides, who would do such a thing? These particular tubes—I can't understand it."

King stood aside uncomfortably as Dr. Montague stormed to the door. They heard him shout, "Mrs. Puckett—Mrs. Puckett—"

The housekeeper appeared, wiping her hands on her apron.

"Mrs. Puckett, have you dared to come into the laboratory? After what I told you—"

"Father. Please," Ruth intervened.

She stepped in front of him and addressed the housekeeper in her usual tones. "You mustn't mind the doctor, Mrs. Puckett. He's terribly distressed because someone has broken some of the culture tubes."

Mrs. Puckett repeated stupidly, "Tubes, Miss Ruth! I don't know anything about no tubes."

"Of course not. I know you have never been inside the laboratory before this moment. But somebody has been here. Have you any idea who it could be?"

The housekeeper's mind refused to relinquish its first impressions, without a struggle. Her face was florid with resentment.

"I seen no tubes, Miss Ruth, and that I sticks to, if you was to put me in a court of law. Not since the day I come here—"

"You've been a splendid help," Ruth said soothingly. "And that's why we want you to help us now. You see, Mrs. Puckett, dreadful damage has been done, and we must all try to find out who is responsible."

Dr. Montague regained his speech. "Where's Fry? And that boy—what's his name? Joe Murgle. Send them to me."

"I'll find them," Ruth said. She gave the housekeeper a gentle push toward the door. "Come along with me, Mrs. Puckett. I can tell you all about it."

"Tubes!" Mrs. Puckett complained.

Nevertheless, she accompanied Ruth without demur. King was left alone with his irate host.

"The woman's a fool!" Dr. Montague snapped, at the closing of the door. "Such wanton destruction. I'll get to the bottom of this, if I have to call in the police. Look here."

King found himself once more gazing at the evidences of destruction. He was profoundly sorry for Dr. Montague's cruel mishap. That such painstaking research should meet with such a fate, he thought, was pretty cruel. True, two of the test tubes remained.

He looked at them more closely. One revealed a number of irregular specks arranged in a curiously mathematical manner. The other was somehow opaque. The glass of the tube appeared to be obscured with a grayish green mist, as though the vessel contained some sort of smoke. He was studying this when Dr. Montague began to mutter. He was staring hard at the second tube

"This is an extraordinary development. That culture was perfectly definable a few hours ago. One would say, almost, that it has thrown off a gas. Phosphorescent gases, of course, present in a semi-opacity. The number of luminous molecules might he said—"

He subsided into vague mutterings as Ruth reentered the laboratory.

"I've questioned both Fry and Joe," the girl said. "They deny any knowledge of it, Father. And I know they are speaking the truth."

"Then who was it?" Dr. Montague demanded.

As he turned aside—dejection in the stoop of his shoulders—King whispered, "Has your father any enemies, Ruth? I mean, I suppose, in a scientific sense?"

"Neither in that or any other sense, so far as I know," she replied. "It is quite inconceivable, for he is the most benign of men, in spite of his little outbursts. And I am sure that no one else knows what sort of research he's working on."

"It's certainly queer."

Ruth slipped an arm about her father.

"Cheer up, Dad dear. After all, we have two cultures left. That's something."

Dr. Montague stared moodily at the wasted work of many months. Presently

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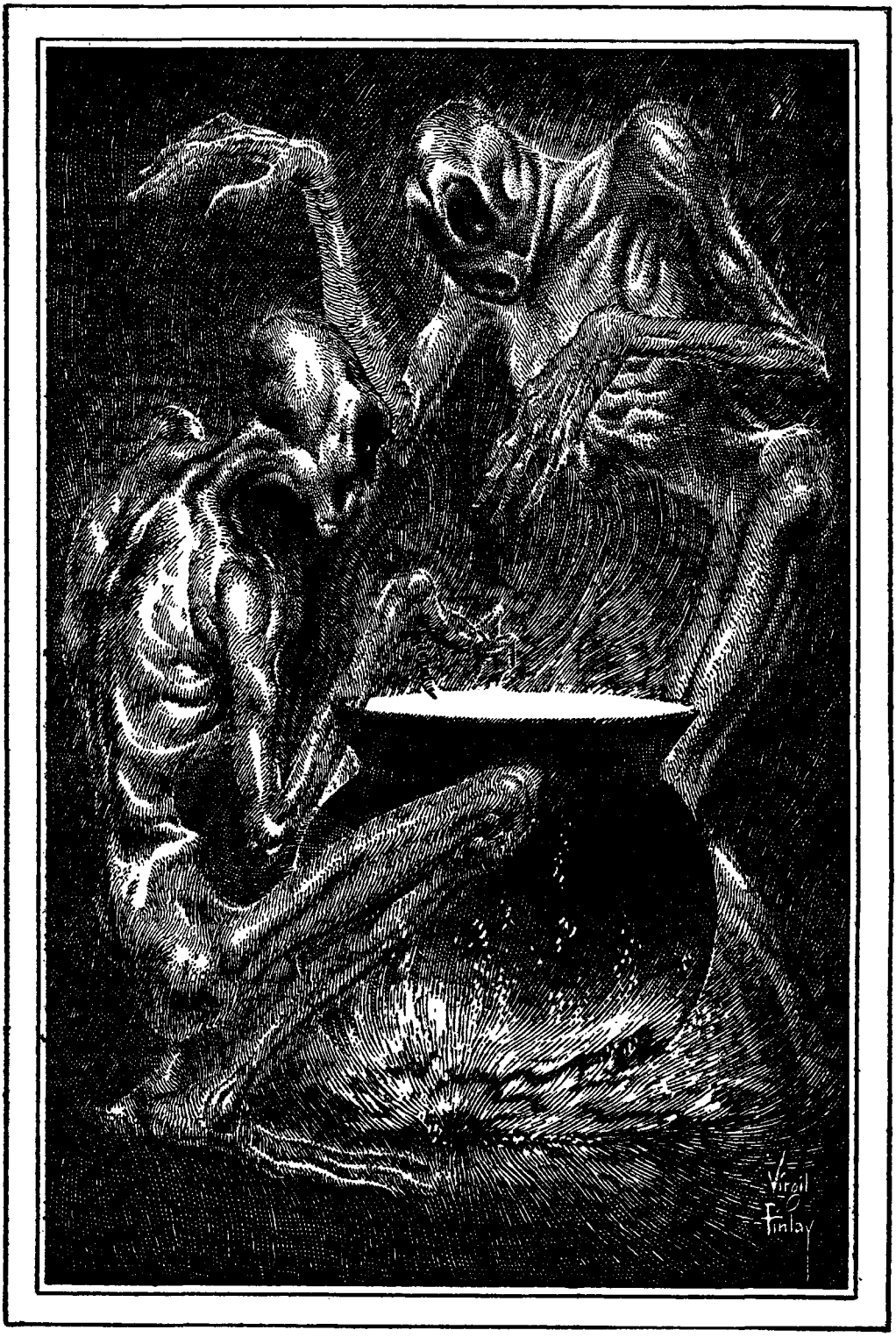

They were not exactly ghosts;
more like things—creatures. . . .

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his frown relaxed. He sighed and patted her hand.

"Yes, that is something. Well, I must have courage. It may be that the blow is not such a heavy one, after all. I think I shall go for a walk."

"I'll put things in order," Ruth promised.

She smiled at him. But when he had gone, her eyes filled with tears.

She said, "It's so disheartening for him, Rod. But it's no use grousing, is it?"

"I wish I were of more use to you," King said.

HE STOOD silently by while she cleaned away the broken glass and set the remaining tubes more firmly in position. The tube that was clouded somehow fascinated him. The smoke, or gas, or whatever it was, appeared to move after the fashion of a sluggish spiral. He pointed this out to Ruth.

She said, "I've been noticing it. There seems to be a kind of asymmetric structure. It resembles a spiral nebula. We'll lock up the laboratory now, Rod. You'll stay to supper?"

"I wanted to."

He went ahead to open the door for her. But suddenly he paused, and half turned, with his hand lifted. His eyes were a little startled.

"What is it, Rod?"

"I thought you touched me."

"No," Ruth said quietly, after a moment of hesitation. "I didn't."

He laughed. "Stupid of me. How nerves trick you sometimes. I could have sworn your hand brushed my cheek."

She said an odd thing. "You believe that, Rod?"

"Believe it was nerves?"

"No." She failed to return his quick smile. "I don't mean that. You believe me when I say that I did not touch you?"

"Why, of course," he said. He wondered if it was the odd lighting that gave such pallor to her cheek. "Of course I believe you."

But she offered no explanation as she went past him to the door. He had a strange impression that she was holding some part of herself in restraint. Her body seemed to quiver as though on the verge of flight—as though she wanted to run.

And suddenly he felt uneasiness. The atmosphere of the laboratory was chill at his back. He had a swift hatred of the place, as if some vast, inimical presence hovered beyond the gathering shadows. His forehead was a little moist when he gained the outside passage.

Ruth said abruptly, "My head aches, Rod. Would you mind if I left you for half an hour, while I lie down?"

"Damn those germs," he thought, as she left him.

He filled his pipe and wandered into the sunset garden. His mood was unusually grave. He had regained his courage where Ruth was concerned. Her refusal had been qualified. She was fond of him, he knew, and he did not altogether despair that time would turn that fondness into love.

But the incident of the laboratory affected him in an entirely different way. There had been an uncanniness about the whole thing. He glanced at the closed laboratory windows and was conscious at once of a return of the sensation, very close to fear, that had oppressed him before. It was difficult to define. But he was convinced that Ruth had also felt it.

Suddenly he remembered what Ruth had said when telling him of her father's experiment with star dust. She had confessed to a feeling almost of fright. It was nothing she had seen or had heard. It was something she had *felt*. Ruth was not the least overimaginative, or hysterical. If she had felt something, there had been something to *be* felt. The word described his own sensation. That was it—he had *felt* something. But what? Viewed calmly and dispassionately, the whole thing was absurd.

He was still seeking a solution when he encountered the gardener, Fry. Indeed, the man stepped deliberately into his path, with a little muttered apology.

"Yes?"

"I wanted to tell you, Mr. King," Fry said. "If I'd have told Miss Ruth, I might have got the boy into trouble, and I don't want to do that."

"What boy? What are you talking about?" King said.

The gardener was very tall and thin, with overlong arms ending in knobby fists. His back and his legs were equally arched by long devotion to weeding. His eyes were slightly crossed, and his cheeks were covered with a thin, black beard.

"Young Joe Murgle," Fry said. "I found him climbing on the roof of the laboratory yesterday arternoon. He weren't doing no harm that I could see. He said he thought I'd meant him to clean the glass, but I never did neither. I called him down. I thought maybe I had ought to tell somebody."

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"Well, if he was doing no harm!"

Fry said gloomily, "Boys is boys. The doctor won't want 'is roofs bust in, like them tubes, or whatever it were."

"Joe couldn't have had anything to do with the tubes, Fry," King said. "It was yesterday that he was on the roof, and the tubes were quite all right this morning. Still, if you think he needs it, I'll warn him off his climbing."

"Just caution 'im like, Mr. King, if you wouldn't mind. I didn't want to go upsetting Miss Ruth. A bang on the ear is what I 'ad in mind, when I first see 'im. This ain't a monkeyhouse at the zoo, I told him. Climbing about. . . ."

"See if you can find him for me."

Joe Murgle presently appeared. He stared at King doubtfully, but without nervousness. His attitude bespoke a conscience serenely at rest.

"So you're Joe?" King said. "You know who I am, don't you?"

"Yes, mister. You're Miss Ruth's young man. Missus Puckett told me." Young Murgle's frank gaze entirely disarmed King. It was respectful, if curious. It seemed to say, "As between men, Mr. King, I admire and envy your choice."

King coughed. He felt that he had turned a little red, and he drew hastily at his pipe, producing a smoke screen for his embarrassment.

He said, with faint sarcasm, "That was very thoughtful of Mrs. Puckett. That is not, however, what I wished to see you about. Fry is complaining, Joe, that you climb about the roofs. I think, if I were you, I'd keep to the ground for the future."

"That's what Fry said," Joe confided. His ingenuous eyes surveyed King thoughtfully. "And I think he's right. The doctor mightn't like it, might he?"

"I'm certain he wouldn't," King said gravely. "You see, Joe, glass has a habit of breaking. By the way, you were not inside the laboratory, of course?"

"No, sir."

"And you don't know of anybody who was? Of course not. And yet somebody was there. Somebody who had no right to be there. How would you like to earn five shillings, Joe?"

"I would so," Joe said.

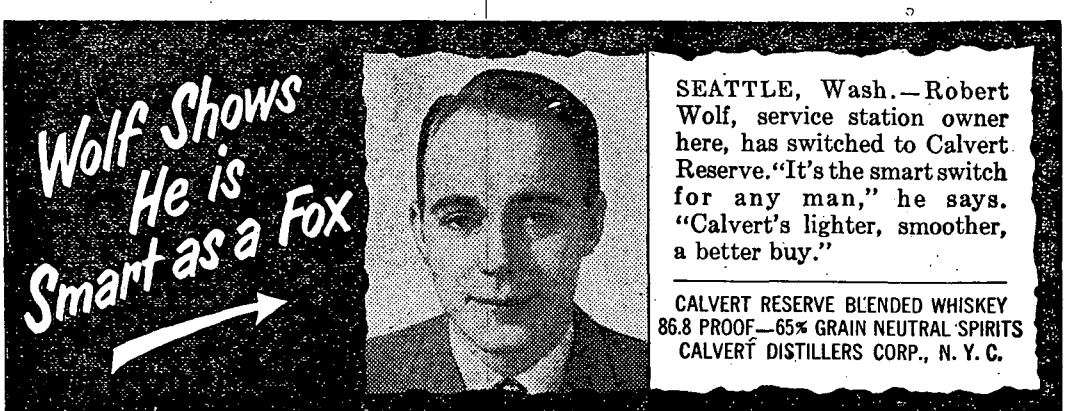
King said, "What I want you to do is to keep an eye on the laboratory after dark. Take a walk around now and again. And if you hear anything strange in the night, wake Fry up and tell him."

"You mean there's burglars about?" Joe said. His eyes shone, and he nodded violently. "I'll watch out, Mr. King. I will so."

"That's the idea," King said, as he strolled away. "If we caught anybody, I might even make it ten shillings."

THE HOT scones—an indigestible of which Joe was inordinately fond—combined with the heat from the wide colonial oven, gave him a cozy sensation both within and without. It had long been dark outside, and the kitchen was comfortably lit by an oil lamp suspended by a chain from a beam of the ceiling. Beyond this pleasant radiance the air was chill. Wind moaned in the fir-trees behind the house, and sounded like some ghostly trombone through the flukes of the chimneys. Now and then, to the impetus of an extra gust, the window panes rattled and tapped, and there would come the hollow echoes of a banging door.

Joe, listening sleepily to this eerie orchestration of the night, hugged his chair more closely. For some time he had been reading, but his lids had grown heavy, and the book now sprawled untidily upon the table at his side. Upon the whole, he


Wolf Shows He is Smart as a Fox
SEATTLE, Wash.—Robert Wolf, service station owner here, has switched to Calvert Reserve. "It's the smart switch for any man," he says. "Calvert's lighter, smoother, a better buy."
CALVERT RESERVE BLENDED WHISKEY
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thought, he preferred to watch Mrs. Puckett and Fry at their nightly game of checkers.

The housekeeper played with deadly gravity. Her expression was wooden, and she breathed heavily through her nose. Her hand hovered perpetually over the board, menacing and inescapable as the hand of Fate itself. She announced her triumphs in a series of asthmatic chuckles.

Fry sat in gloomy silence. He was a poor loser, and more than once his knobby fingers clutched at his beard in annoyance. To one whose lifetime philosophy has included a supreme contempt of woman's intellect, it was doubtless galling in the extreme to meet defeat at fair hands. Yet the truth must be told that of three hundred and twenty-five games played to date, Fry had won exactly two. The three hundred and twenty-sixth game was now in progress, and the gardener had never at any stage so far—as the sport pages would say—looked dangerous.

Imperceptibly, Joe's head drooped. Presently he slumbered. He was utterly unconscious of Mrs. Puckett's satisfaction when Fry discovered himself fleeing from square to square like a frightened fowl pursued by the fox of the housekeeper's cunning.

"Another game?" Mrs. Puckett invited, as Fry came panting to defeat in the corner.

Fry shook his head. "No, Mrs. Puckett, I won't. You don't play me fair. I should have been 'uffed, and you never 'uffed me. It woulda made all the difference in the game, and you know it."

"If I'd 'uffed you," Mrs. Puckett said majestically, "it would have been all over long ago. Besides, Fry, you wasn't due to be 'uffed."

She began to put the men into their cardboard box. Fry filled his pipe and puffed sulkily. "Look at that pore tired boy," she said maternally, nodding at Joe. "Time he was in bed."

"Lazy young 'ound," said the gardener.

"I'm wondering if it was him that bust them tubes of the doctor's," Mrs. Puckett said. "Somebody must ha' bust them, Fry. And if Joe didn't, and I didn't, then who did?"

"Meaning me?" Fry challenged.

"I never said so." Mrs. Puckett looked over her generous shoulder apprehensively. She lowered her voice. "I tell you what, Fry, there's things come over this 'ouse that I don't altogether like. Not, as you might say, Christian."

"What things?"

"Ah! there you 'ave me," Mrs. Puckett confessed. "Goings on. 'Auntings."

"Eyemaggernashun!" Fry said.

"This evening," Mrs. Puckett said, staring at him, "I was coming out of the little corridor, when something tickled my leg."

Fry eyed the member in question. "Fleas," he suggested inelegantly.

Mrs. Puckett bridled. She said tartly, "Nothing of the kind. It was more like fingers. You needn't wag that beard. I know what I'm saying. Fingers it felt like. And there was nobody there. Not a thing to see."

The gardener's expression was openly doubting. "Well, if you says so. But how could it be fingers? And whose fingers? Your own, p'raps."

"Would I tickle my own leg?" asked Mrs. Puckett. "I would not. Have it your own way."

Fry rose and yawned. The yawn ended in a grin.

"I'm going to bed. And I hope nobody tickles me in my sleep."

"Nobody," Mrs. Puckett said, "would want to tickle you, asleep or awake. Nobody nor nothing."

ON THIS discordant note, at the noise of Fry's departure, Joe Murgle awoke. He sat up and rubbed his eyes. "One down, the other up." Mrs. Puckett said.

"Where's Mr. Fry?" Joe asked.

"Where you ought to be—in bed," the housekeeper retorted. But her tone was without malice. She liked young Murgle. "Look at the time."

"Termorrer's Sunday."

"And the next day is Monday," said Mrs. Puckett. "And the day arter that is Tuesday. None of your lip. And besides, Joe, I'm off myself. Emily comes to see me termorrer, and I like to look my best."

"I'm going," Joe said.

He was halfway to his room when he remembered the task assigned to him by King. It offered little attraction, but he was conscientious. Grumbling, he turned aside and took the path to the quadrangle into which the laboratory jutted from the main building like a peninsular. The area was in darkness save for the still lighted window of Ruth's sitting room, which gave upon the right of the quadrangle. Joe looked at this bright spot wistfully.

Now that he was actually embarked upon the duties of watchman, the promised remuneration seemed ridiculously small. Where he stood, he was in part sheltered

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from the cold wind. The sound of its excursions through the caverns of the night, however, came eerily to his ears. But for his pride he would have retreated then and there. As it was, his lower lip was caught comfortingly between his teeth, as he advanced upon the massed blackness of the laboratory.

He was intent now only upon satisfying his conscience as quickly as possible, and joining Fry in the harbor of their bedroom.

He thought, edging his way past the end of the laboratory, that he caught the echo of King's voice now and then on the strings of the wind. Once, too, he was sure that he heard Ruth laughing. These human evidences bolstered his courage tremendously.

After all, a man wasn't to be scared by a handful of black shadow. His creepy feeling, he decided, was due to the fact that he was tired: A fellow's nerves got that way now and again. Well, he'd go round the three sides of the laboratory and then he'd go to bed. He wasn't quite sure that he wasn't making a fool of himself, after all. Probably Mr. King had only been joking. He was the kind to joke, Joe thought. That was it. What was the use of prowling around like this, anyway? Nothing to do. Nothing to hear, but only the wind. Nothing to see—

He had halted, halfway down the side of the laboratory. The blind eye of a window stared at him blankly. Yielding to some strange urge, he drew nearer to it, wondering at the sudden clamor of blood in his ears.

One part of his brain insisted that he draw nearer and yet nearer; the other part shrieked at him to turn and run. He felt as he supposed the blue wren had felt that day of the summer before, when he had come upon a snake coiled about the level of its nest. The bird was perfectly helpless under the evil of the snake's eyes. It came closer and closer, chirping feebly, with ruffled feathers and drooping beak. He had killed the snake just in time. Horace and little Hermie had both wanted the pretty skin. . . .

The sweat started on Joe's forehead. There was something behind the window pane. Not a face. No, not a face. If it had been a face, he wouldn't have felt so sick, because a face was human. But his terrified subconsciousness shouted at him that this wasn't human. It was like a tangle of thin white string, with two knots in the center of it. Knots or eyes. He didn't know which. It mounted the glass, moving sideward, as a spider does. Only it wasn't a spider, either. It shone, somehow. It was very faint and indistinct, but still it shone. That part of it reminded him of the things you could find on trees, sometimes. Fungus things full of phosphorus. And it hadn't a body. A face without a body. . . .

Joe was paralyzed with fear. The whole of his thin, undersized body was shaking. He tried to call out, but only a little moan escaped him. He was drawn irresistibly forward, until now his own face almost pressed against the glass. He thought—and it was extraordinary what relief the thought brought to him—that he was dreaming. It was a nightmare. He'd got that from mum. Mum often had nightmares. Presently he would wake up and hear Fry snoring.

His forehead was touching the glass when a sharp report came within. The spell snapped, and he ran screaming for the house. . . .

DR. MONTAGUE'S depression had failed to respond to open-air treatment. He had returned to the house from his walk, more distressed and bewildered than before. He had eaten his tea in silence, and would thereafter have escaped to his bedroom, had not Ruth set herself to coax back his normal courage.

She said, taking his arm as they rose from the meal, "I hate you to have such disappointment, Father. But there are two of the tubes left. You can't deny that. And one is in a particularly interesting stage of development."

"It's the delay that irritates me most," Dr. Montague said. "It was nearly three months before the slightest sign of—I won't say life, but metabolism—showed itself. Anything might have come out of it—anything. I had the greatest hopes, particularly of the culture in the silicic solution. It was undoubtedly developing on the lines of Quincke's foam-cells, and I—"

"Suppose we talk it over tonight in my sitting room," Ruth suggested. "Rod would love to hear about what you have been doing. Never say die, Daddy."

He smiled at her affectionately.

"Hear her, King. Who could despair, with a daughter like that? We'll talk it over, and see if we can't form a theory to fit the known facts."

King asked, as they sat, later, about the fire in Ruth's sitting room, "What is this

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star dust exactly, Doctor? Ruth has told me something, but no doubt you can tell me a lot more."

"Meteoric dust," Dr. Montague corrected. He mused a moment. "You know," he said presently, his eyes abstracted, "they've even found meteoric dust within the Arctic circle. On the tops of the highest mountains and in the depths of the deepest oceans. As Hummoldt said, 'It is with a sense of wonder that we touch, weigh, and submit to chemical analysis metallic and earthly masses appertaining to the world without.'

"Some forty thousand meteors are gathered up hourly by the earth. They enter our atmosphere with tremendous velocity, but are in general reduced by its resistance to a metallic vapor. This vapor is condensed into a metallic dust, and so falls to earth."

"You believe that some of this dust carries a form of life, then?"

"I see no reason why it should not," Dr. Montague asserted. "Aristotle, for example, believed that motion constituted life. That is to say, King, life is a series of fermentations or molecular interchanges, which we call catalytic actions. And Surruta, in the Yajueveda, sets out the theory that all moving bodies are to be regarded as living, and all bodies at rest may be said to be dead."

Ruth said, "Father has treated the cosmical dust with both radium and chloride salt, after mixing it with gelatin. The four tubes that were broken were the radium tubes. Two were treated with strong radium bromide, one with barium chloride, and one with uranium. Of the two unbroken tubes, the clouded culture is based upon glycerine and liquid air, and the other is under treatment with cyanogen. Cyanogen is a bicarburet of nitrogen."

"The point which most fascinates me," King said, "is the implied variety of the life the dust might contain. It could easily, I suppose, hold embryonic life, or whatever you call it, from half a dozen worlds, or more."

"Exactly," Dr. Montague said. He warmed to his subject. "Take cyanogen, for instance. It is known that living proteid contains the radical cyanogen.

"It holds a vast amount of energy, though not as much as that contained in the radium compounds.

"It is reasonable to suppose—if cyanogen is a half living thing, as Pfluger suggested—that it will form growths in cultural media. From such growth I am presuming that vitalization of any atoms or electrons contained in the cosmical dust is possible."

King could not repress a slight shiver. "Suppose there were electrons, and that they became active, as you are hoping. What form of life would be evolved?"

"It is, of course, impossible to say," Dr. Montague answered gravely. "It might be life as we know it upon earth, in all its marvelously varied forms.

"It might be—and this I believe the more probable—a form totally unlike anything we have even conceived of. I take it, however, that it would be some sort of protoplasmic body.

"Protoplasm, which it is generally supposed living matter *must* contain, is invariably composed of highly complex compounds of carbon, oxygen, hydrogen, and nitrogen. It may contain also such other elements as iron, sulphur, phosphorus, and so on.

"But the first four are the absolute essentials of life as we know it. No form of life has ever been discovered that does not contain them."

"Earthly life," Ruth said. It seemed to King that her eyes were suddenly troubled. "We know nothing of the constituents of interstellar life, if there is any."

King nodded.

"We can argue only from the known," Dr. Montague said. "We know that an organism has a structure, a nucleus, and a cell-wall. Its vitality is a continuous process of adjustment between its internal and external relations.

"Bodies are formed possessing a definite structure, which occupy a certain position in space, and go through a cyclic process in time. And we know, also, that there are certain limits of temperature for different types of life.

"One other thing we know—there is no evidence for believing that the most elementary forms of living matter have always been and always will be the most elementary. But what we don't know is immeasurably greater."

"In the attempts to produce life artificially, how far, then, has science actually gone?"

Dr. Montague shrugged his shoulders. He said, "Artificial synthesis has never yet produced the highly complicated structure of the natural cell. Science has evolved artificially cells which are able to perform the functions of organic life.

"They can assimilate, grow, multiply, subdivide, and so on. They can go through

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the whole cyclic process. But they have not that vitality which we call life. There is always something lacking.

"The link is not there. Has not yet been discovered, I should say.

"But, I tell you, King, I shall discover it. I believe I have discovered it.

"In those lost cultures I had already observed manifestations never before seen; or, at least, never yet recorded. Now perhaps you can more fully appreciate the tragedy of what has happened. I was on the verge of a stupendous discovery. And now—"

He sank his face into his hands.

Ruth said quickly, "And now we must concentrate upon the two tubes left to us. I wonder, Father, what structure interstellar life takes. There may be all sorts of very queer developments. Unhuman shapes—"

This roused him. "To be sure. I have speculated at some length upon that. It is even possible that such creatures have no shape at all, in the material sense. They may be thought forms only."

"Thought forms!" King cried.

Again he caught that uneasy look in Ruth's eyes. It was, he told himself, almost a hunted look.

"BIOGEN or mind-stuff," Dr. Montague explained. "Is there, after all, a difference between matter and mind-stuff? Might they not in reality be but different manifestations of the one thing? The atom, for example, is supposed by some to be as immaterial as consciousness—in fact, the source of all consciousness, as we know it.

"What are electrons? As has been said, we can reduce matter to motion, and what do we know of motion save that it is a mode of thought? The phenomenon of mind is dependent upon the phenomena of matter. What are the minds of other people but the perceptions of our own minds? Wheels within wheels. Mind perceiving mind. If mind ceased, would the universe cease? Possibly it would.

"You may remember Tom Collins' whimsical verses which he based upon the Eastern belief that nothing exists but Brahma? In other words we do not really exist outside the mind of the god. We are 'such stuff as dreams are made on.' When Brahma wakes, we vanish."

"A pagan idea," Ruth objected.

"Nevertheless," said Dr. Montague, "an idea to which present day science is tending, in a modified way. The world of mind, and the world of matter. A unity and plurality in all things. Who shall say?"

He fell into a silent abstraction.

King glanced at the clock on the mantel. "I had no idea it was so late. I've been keeping you up. It's high time I went."

Ruth, with a glance at her preoccupied father, motioned him to the couch by her side.

She said, in a low voice, "Rod, do you think you need to go? I mean it's so late. We could easily make a place for you down here."

"Something," King said, interpreting her look, "is worrying you. I've thought so all the evening. And now I am sure of it. What is it?"

She was usually so perfectly courageous that her reply was in the nature of a shock.

"Rod, I'm scared—I'm scared stiff. I can't explain the feeling. I've been terrified ever since we found those broken tubes."

"It's the fault of my stupid curiosity," King said. "It's all this theorizing we've done."

"No," Ruth said, "it isn't that at all. Something, Rod, has happened in the laboratory. I haven't an idea what it is, but I'm quite certain that something is there that was not there yesterday. I felt it. I even felt it physically. So did you."

"What!" King exclaimed. He was conscious of a tingling at the roots of his hair. "You mean you, too, felt something touch you?"

"My cheek, once," the girl said, a little unsteadily. "And once my hand. I didn't tell you, then, because you looked to be startled on your own account. And all I thought about really was to get outside the place and lock the door. It felt—well, as if a furred body had brushed past me.

"And there was, just for a moment, a sort of animal smell. But I dare say it was my imagination. Of course, it's all impossible. We saw for ourselves that there was nothing there."

"Imagination, of course," King declared, fighting his subtle fear. "It's extraordinary, you know, how things can trick you. Still, for the time, such fears are very real, I know. They'll be all gone in the morning."

"I know. That's what I keep telling myself. What was it touched *you*, Rod?"

The question was so direct that it left him no time for evasion.

He stammered, "It certainly wasn't hairy. I thought you had drawn one of those glass pipettes across the back of my neck.

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It was smooth and cold. . . . I can't quite explain."

"Rod, I'm frightened."

King took his nerves in hand. "Look here, it's really all right. You mustn't get panicky . . . you, of all people. You're tired, now, and sharing your dad's sense of disappointment and failure. Now, see here—if it will ease your mind at all for me to be around, I'll stay gladly. In fact, I prefer to stay. I couldn't bear to think of you all alone with your—your nerves."

"I'm really quite childish," she said. But her relief was very plain to see. "I'm ashamed. . . . Oh, but, Rod, if you hadn't been here. . . ."

"But I am here."

He had taken her hand between his own hands, uncaring for Dr. Montague's presence.

"I'll be right here, in case I'm needed. But you'll find everything will be all right. Once you get to sleep. . . ."

He broke off at the smothered sound of running feet. The interruption appeared, too, to penetrate Dr. Montague's abstraction, for the scientist sat up abruptly, and looked sharply about him.

He said, "What is that? Who is that?"

The door opened violently, and Joe Murgle, his hair awry, his eyes filmed with terror, stood there, swaying. His mouth opened and shut, but only a moan issued.

KING sprang forward, and took him by the shoulders. "Now, then. What's the matter? Take your time, Joe. You're safe and sound. What's wrong? Something frighten you?"

"It's the labortry, Mr. King. Something inside fired off a gun. I seen a bunch of white string."

King pushed him to the couch where he fell back, trembling.

Dr. Montague cried, "What did you say? Something in the laboratory. Ruth—the meteoric dust! Where's my torch?"

King called, "Doctor—you don't know what may be there. Wait until the morning."

But the scientist had already vanished.

"Ruth," King said, "don't move out of this room. I insist. Look after that boy."

She showed a blanched face over her shoulder. "I must come."

"You will *not*."

He touched her hair in passing, and, next moment was in the ill-lighted corridor, and running in the wake of Dr. Montague. The scientist was fumbling to unlock the door of the laboratory. So great was his eagerness that he could scarcely control his fingers.

"Let me hold the torch," King said.

Dr. Montague said, out of his fuming:

"God bless me, King, surely my dream has come true at last! What can it be but laboratory life! I, Felix Montague, have accomplished what no other scientist in the world has done. Life, King . . . life out of the stars."

The door fell back and they entered together. King sent the light of the powerful torch from side to side of the room, but saw nothing. Dr. Montague had hurried to the case containing the two remaining star cultures.

He called, "I see—I see. Fool that I was. It was the escaping life that shattered the tubes. Life expanding—life triumphant—See, the fifth tube has burst. It was the noise of its bursting that the boy mistook for a pistol shot. The star germs are here—here in this room. I feel it. I know. Think of it. . . ."

King turned the torch on the case. It was the culture resembling the radiobes that had shattered spontaneously. The sixth tube—that containing the odd appearance of smoke circulating within—was intact.

As the rays of light swept it, the smoke inside seemed to boil and to emit tiny sparks. It was, he thought, like the dissolving, iridescent fires of a great opal.

King was still staring at the malevolent beauty of it when a choking cry at his back brought him about with a start. Dr. Montague was standing a few paces away, his hands thrusting at the air. His mouth was half open and his nostrils whistled. He had all the appearance of a man in the clutch of apoplexy.

Following a second of horrified pause, King sprang to the scientist's aid. He was in time to catch him as he crumpled slowly backward. And here, as his hands closed upon the slackened body, a sickening sensation swept over him. There appeared to be, between Dr. Montague's flesh and his own, a kind of furred tissue. It slid from his touch on the instant, as though a skin had been withdrawn from about the scientist's wrists.

A foetid, elemental stench came and went.

As King lifted the fainting man bodily in his arms, the angle of torchlight swept the open door. He thought he saw something pass through into the corridor. The impression was so brief that he could not be sure of this, yet some inner sense told

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him that he had not only imagined it.

It was like a small, ragged cloud, jet-black at the edges, with a kind of core or nucleus of faintly luminous lines. And immediately he found himself adopting Joe Murgle's simile of a tangle of white string. That exactly described it.

And yet he had actually seen, in a physical sense, nothing. The vision—if it was a vision—had crossed the lens, not of his eye but of his mind.

He lost no time in speculation. He carried Dr. Montague into the corridor and laid him gently on the floor. He shut and locked the laboratory door.

Then only did he pause to wipe away the cold sweat that bathed his face. He found no words for the sheer terror of his thought. He felt as though Hell itself had drawn near. He bent over Dr. Montague, and thanked heaven to find him faintly breathing. . . .

CHAPTER III

BIRTH OF A BIOGEN

THE feud between Joe Murgle's father and his foreman, now in its third consecutive week, had not improved the temper of either. In Mr. Murgle's view, Providence was strongly to be commended for having afflicted the foreman with a new boil of much superior proportions to the old one.

"Let 'im rouse," Mr. Murgle told his wife, as he held out his plate for still another sausage. "Who cares? We all 'ope he gets as many boils as the bloke Jane was learning about in her lessons last Sunday school. What was his name, Jane?"

"Job," said Miss Murgle testily. Having dined in advance, under economic pressure, she was now engaged at a side table with her home lessons. "I wish people wouldn't talk so much. Think I want to be kept in for having my sums all wrong?"

"I'll talk when I like and 'ow I like, in me own 'ome," Mr. Murgle assured her. He bolted what was left of his sausage, and glared angrily. "Who earns the living?"

"Who does my homework?" Jane countered.

Mrs. Murgle said weakly, "'Ave you no respeck for your father?"

"Now I've made a blot!" Jane said, with heat.

"Joe's wrote again," Mrs. Murgle said in haste. "Read it, Father. And, look—he's sent a order for ten shillings to buy something fer little 'Ermie."

Mr. Murgle gaped.

"Ten bob!"

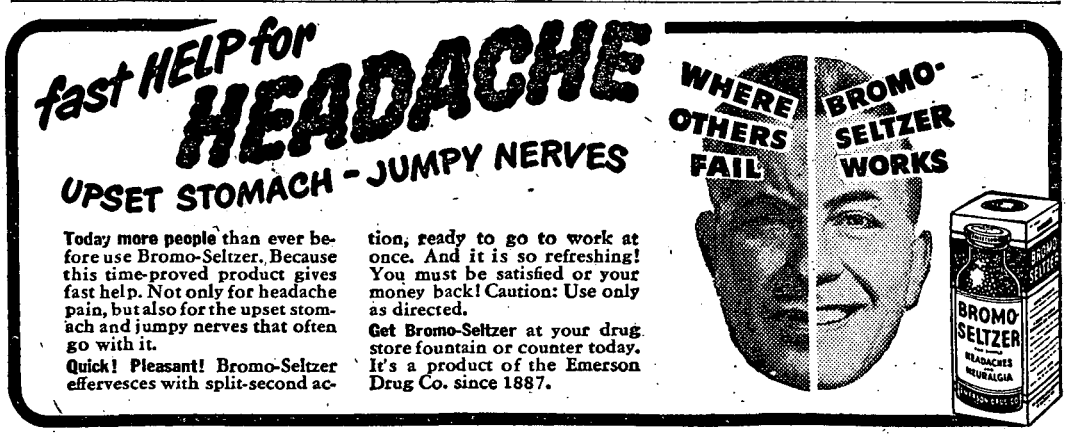
"He earned it extry," said Mrs. Murgle proudly. "And I should say so. Such goings on, they ain't respectable. You read and see."

"Give it 'ere," Mr. Murgle invited.

He lit his pipe and attacked his son's handwriting.

"Dear Mum:

O. Mum, we have had a time. It was all over the labortry the doctor has got. Wait till I tell you, Mum. Well, the doctor and Miss Ruth work in the labortry you know doing things with germs. And Mr. King said would you like to earn ten shillings Joe and I said yes I would. And he said I want you to see no one breaks into the labortry. Becos you see Mum somebody did break in yesterday and broke things. And the doctor was frightfully upset about it. He thought it was Mrs. Puckett or Fry, the gardener. He knew of coarse it could not be me becos I am well liked and respected. And so Mr. King said you keep an eye on things Joe and we will find out who done the deed. And I said yes. I would. . . ."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"Would what!" Mr. Murgle demanded, as he turned a page. He was reading aloud, spelling the words carefully and with due emphasis. "What's all this about?"

"Do hurry up, Father," said Jane. Apparently the alleged importance of her own task was forgotten, for she was resting inquisitively, one ink-stained finger prodding her lip. "If you like, I'll read it out for you. I will so."

"I won't be 'ustled," Mr. Murgle said, in the tone he might use towards his foreman. "Impertinent miss. That's what you are. An impertinent miss."

After a maddening pause, deliberately designed for reproof, he resumed:

"Well Mum last night I went to see if the labortry was all right as I knew Mr. King wanted my help badly.

It was a dark night but I was not afrade becos I have a clean conscience and nothing can harm you if you have a clean conscience Mrs. Puckett says.

And so I went outside and walked round the labortry. And I was just saying its all right Joe you can go to bed when I saw something behind the labortry window.

O Mum I thought it was a ball of string it was all white and shiny. But I was not afrade. I said what are you doing in there. You had better come out or you will get into worse trouble my lad. And with that he fired a gun at me and missed my head by inches.

I was not afrade but I thought this is too hot. And so I ran to find Mr. King and the doctor. And while they went to see what it was all about I stayed with Miss Ruth to comfort her. Becos she is only a woman and they are easily scared even if they have a clean conscience like I have. . . ."

Mr. Murgle paused. He said thickly, "The boy's gone dotty. 'Ow could a ball of string shoot at him? That's what I want to know. Joe's delirious. I 'ope they've sent for a medical doctor, mother."

"No, he's not ill," Mrs. Murgle said. "You want to read it all, Father, and you'll see. It was something to do with a star."

"What star?" Mr. Murgle asked blankly.

"Pooh! I like that about a woman being scared," Jane said, with scorn. "That's all rot about Joe not being scared, himself. I know Joe!"

"Don't argue!" Mr. Murgle said. He sucked imperiously at his pipe. "I won't have it. Well . . . ."

He resumed.

"Mum Mr. King and the doctor went to the labortry and the doctor had a fit. Anyway thats what Fry thinks. Fry thinks that its all nonsense about ghosts. Fry thinks that the doctor has something at tea that went wrong with his inside and made him sick.

But Mrs. Puckett says Fry is always like that. He talks silly Joe. And I said yes I know its his whiskers. And Mrs. Puckett larfed like anything. Anyway Mum the doctor was real bad when Mr. King brought him out of the labortry. I heard him say to Miss Ruth its all right darling he will live. He is only in a faint. And she said what has happened. And he said God knows something horrible but you must be brave. And then he kissed her and said its a star germ. And Dr. Montague woke up and said did you see it King. And he said you must not talk yet doctor. It is all right. And we will talk about it in the morning. And then I went to bed. . . ."

Mr. Murgle grunted as he took up the final page. He was out of breath with the unaccustomed exertion of reading aloud, and he blew heavily on his pipe. The effect was disastrous. A little comet of smoke and sparks shot into the round, inquisitive face of little Hermie.

The silence was at once shattered by a piercing scream.

Mrs. Murgle threw herself upon her disordered infant.

"There now . . . . Did father's nasty smoke sting her eye! 'Orrie, you hold your noise. Can't one of you cry without the other? Stop it—both of you."

"Kids!" Mr. Murgle said bitterly. He held his hands to his ears. "Noise. Jane, you take 'em outside."

"I want to hear the rest of Joe's letter."

"You do as I tell you," Mr. Murgle roared.

"I want—"

Mr. Murgle lifted a hand as red and hard as the bricks among which it moved, lived and had its being.

"Don't argue. Take them kids outside."

"Darn!" Miss Murgle said.

She plucked little Hermie from her high chair, seized Horace by his yellow topknot, and carried the uproarious twain bodily from the room.

"Noise!" Mr. Murgle complained. Presently he calmed.

He read on huskily.

"Mum Mrs. Puckett's neece Emily came here this morning. She is a pretty girl. Just like me at her age Mrs. Puckett said but I had more branes. If Emily had my branes she would go on the stage. And I said branes aren't everything Mrs. Puckett look at members of parliment. My father says they get paid to do nothing.

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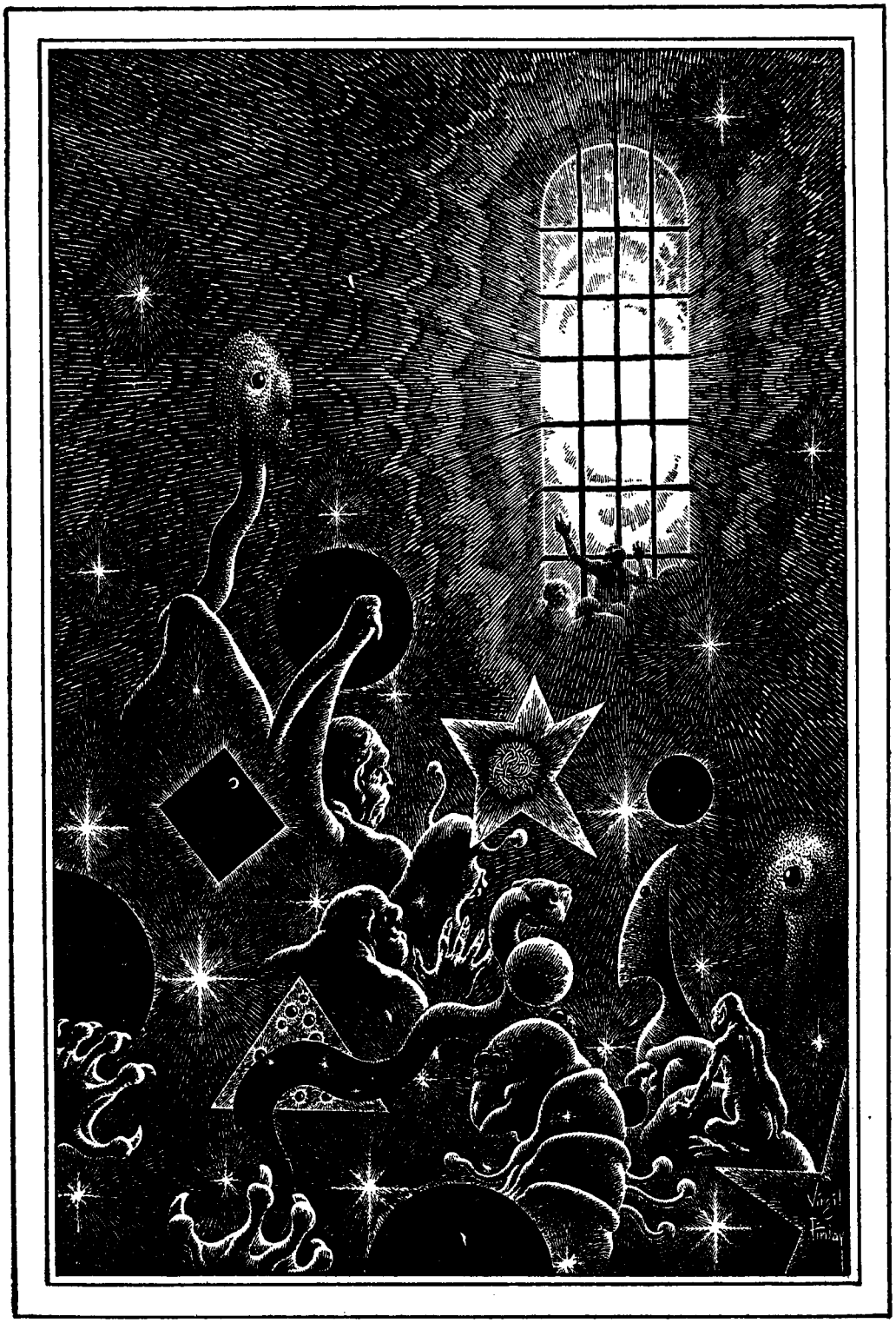

No nightmare conception was missing from the uncanny host that swarmed against the walls. . . .

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And Mrs. Puckett said true Joe. Anyhow Mum Emily and me got on fine and I would like you to see her. Mrs. Puckett said she will make a fine wife for somebody just like me. And Mr. Fry who was there said yes you mean a fine widow. But we do not know what he meant. Well Mum this is all at present from your loving son—

Joe.

P.S. Mr. King gave me ten shillings. He said you have earned it Joe and I said yes I have.

Joe."

"If you ask me," Mr. Murgle said, laying his son's letter aside, "there's been rum goings on." He shook his head. "Very rum," he said.

The door opened and Jane's head appeared. Her face was red and her voice was spiteful.

She said, "Mum, little Hermie fell into the wash trough. She's soaking wet. But it's no use blaming me because it wasn't my fault."

"There you are," said Mr. Murgle. "Pesky kids!"

KING wakened on the following morning with a feeling of blankness. He had slept fitfully through the short hours of the night, and his dreams were haunted by the dread events of yesterday evening.

As he lay, now, blinking at the walls, he reviewed these bizarre happenings with distaste. Fear had vanished with the darkness.

In the comforting light of day he was, indeed, inclined to wonder if imagination had been responsible for most of their fear. It was possible, he thought, that by some psychological blundering he had allowed Joe Murgle's panic to infect him without any real justification.

Yet there was no denying that something very out of the ordinary *had* occurred. When Dr. Montague soberly asserted that his throat had been constricted, as though by the clutch of invisible hands—he remembered that the scientist had used the word talons—and when he himself had distinctly *felt* something under his physical touch, these evidences were not lightly to be discounted. There was also the undeniable fact that he had seen a shadow—at any rate, a shape of some sort—pass through the laboratory door into the corridor.

King had momentarily forgotten this. At the recollection, he left his bed and began to dress. If the whole thing was not the figment of his overwrought emotions at the time, it followed that the shape, the thing, or whatever one chose to call it, was actually now somewhere in the house. Unless, of course, it had escaped into the open. There was that possibility.

But the thought that Ruth had been exposed to such risk through the darkness, brought him a return of his overnight terror. There had been—there was—grave potential danger for them all. He felt that he was living through a nightmare.

Existence had become so unreal that it bordered almost on insanity. He could imagine what the alienists would retort were he to insist in their hearing that Red Gates was occupied by a being—possible beings—hatched from the embryonic dust of other worlds.

To his great relief, King met Ruth in the passage, as he searched for the bathroom. She was pale, with great shadows under her eyes. But she managed a smile in greeting.

He asked anxiously, "How did you sleep?"

"Badly, I'm afraid. And you?"

"Quite well," King lied.

He was more than glad that he had said nothing to Ruth of the Shape which he imagined he had seen escaping from the laboratory. He had, in fact, been so occupied in the resuscitation of Dr. Montague, that this detail of the adventure had been forgotten at the time. At one stage, he had actually believed that the scientist would die.

All the symptoms of strangulation were manifested, even to the blackened face and swollen tongue. These symptoms, strangely enough, did not reveal themselves until after King had carried him from the laboratory to the sitting room. They came with returning consciousness, as though projected, as it might be, by Dr. Montague's fear. It was a kind of hypnosis of the subconscious. Strangely, also, these symptoms stopped short of any exterior bruising. The flesh of his throat was without mark of any kind. He complained, however, of a soreness such as might ensue from the bruising pressure of fingers or claws.

"I was coming to call you," Ruth said. "Breakfast has been waiting for some time."

"I'll be right along," said King. "How is your father? No ill effects?"

Ruth looked at him queerly.

"That's a funny thing, Rod. He is perfectly well. All the soreness has gone from

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his throat. I really believe that until I spoke of it, father was almost convinced he had dreamed the whole thing. I had that feeling myself, for a blessed moment or two. I'm still greatly confused. It's all so utterly impossible that my mind isn't able to adjust itself."

King said, wondering if she remembered how he had kissed her under the mean advantage of her distress and terror, "Don't think about it for a while. After breakfast we'll hold a council of war."

She nodded and left him.

When he entered the breakfast room Dr. Montague came forward and shook him earnestly by the hand. "Ruth tells me I owe my life to you, King."

"Hardly as much as that, I think." He smiled at the girl. "I'm tremendously glad, though, that I was on the spot."

"What happened?" demanded Dr. Montague. "I want to hear your version of things."

King gave it. He said nothing, however, of the escaping shadow.

"When I wakened this morning," the scientist said, "I recollected that I had been taken ill in the laboratory. I conceived it possible, at first, that the muggy warmth of the room had overcome me. As the details became clearer, however, I knew that this was not so. I was attacked. Without the slightest warning, something took me by the throat. I managed to call out. At that point, my memory fails me."

"What was it that attacked you?" Ruth said quietly.

Dr. Montague passed a hand over his brow. "I think there is only one answer to that, my dear. I was attacked by a star germ. One moment, King. We mustn't make the mistake, you know, of conceiving all life to be on the lines of our earthly life. The highest form of intelligence on this earth is man. But all intelligence is not necessarily confined to the bodily shapes which we know. You saw nothing last night, for instance?"

"No," King said, after hesitating briefly.

"And yet you saw me being attacked. That is to say, you saw me in an attitude, and wearing an expression, which immediately suggested to you that I was struggling and in distress. Matter may take, in other spheres, forms totally opposed to our own flesh and blood. My opponent—intelligence, beast, or what you will—was of this unreckoned order. Impalpable—invisible, and yet endowed with all the attributes of will and strength. Possibly, as I said yesterday, we are in conflict now with one of those extremely complex aggregations of perceptions or ideas which we call atoms of matter. Electrons—mind-stuff. Here we would have the metabolism of what we call life.

"Conscious ideas or units which aggregate and disintegrate. Thought made manifest. Or, possibly, thought-form taking to itself a thought-shape consistent with its particular stage of development. Such units might be good or they might be evil, using those terms as we on earth know them. In this case, it is evident that we have to do with evil."

Ruth said, with a shudder, "How can you talk of it so calmly? You believe, Father, that such a—a creature—"

"I would call it—wanting a more-accurate name—a Biogen," Dr. Montague suggested, with a faint smile.

"Very well. You believe that this Biogen is actually in the laboratory? A powerful, malignant Presence? How is that possible, seeing that only yesterday it was confined to a small test tube? How could it reach such proportions in so short a time?"

"My dear," Dr. Montague said, patting

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her hand, "here once again you adopt earthly standards. What, indeed, is Time? Is it finite or infinite? What do any of us know of it save that certain processes are taking place in that particular portion of it in which we ourselves have our being, and over which our puny reasoning powers range? We can look backward and forward, but we cannot conceive either a beginning or an end of absolute time. Time is a relative term.

"A Biogen may—indeed, we have this indisputable proof that it does—reach maturity, or close to maturity, within a few hours of earth time."

DR. MONTAGUE broke off to rub his hands together. His face shone with scientific enthusiasm.

"I must confess," he said, "that I lose my fear in the sheer wonder of what has happened. Life from the depths of infinite space, King. Star germs—"

"From where?"

"The mechanism of Life itself," said Dr. Montague. "From Mars— From Jupiter or Neptune— Or from worlds far beyond our solar system . . . who knows? I will even say, who cares? That such life has been made manifest upon earth is all that concerns me.

"Well, we shall see. King, you have been exceedingly kind. I would like to tempt you to greater kindness. Will you accompany me to the laboratory immediately?"

Ruth cried, "Father! After what nearly happened last night! Are you mad? Rod, we must not let him. These dreadful experiments have gone far enough. Too far. The laboratory should be destroyed."

"Nonsense," Dr. Montague said, almost angrily. "You grossly overestimate the danger, Ruth. Probably the Biogen has already dissolved back into the constituent particles of the nucleus from which it sprang. It can be at most an unstable aggregate, and, as such, cannot possibly survive our limits of temperature. Shall we go?"

"There may be other Biogens."

Dr. Montague dismissed this with a wave of the hand.

"Forewarned is forearmed," he quoted contemptuously. "If there was danger, it is long past. Really, Ruth—"

"Father, it's wicked," the girl said.

But she made no further attempt to dissuade him. She said, "Very well. Let us go, then."

"You're not going?" King said.

"Why not?"

"It isn't any place for you," King argued. He looked to Dr. Montague for corroboration of this, but the scientist was deep in abstraction. "Ruth—to please me?"

"No, Rod. I might apply the same argument to yourself. It isn't any more dangerous for me than it is for you or father."

King gave in. "All right. But I don't like it. You'll keep close to me? Promise?"

"Do you think I *like* going into that horrible place? The very thought of it makes me feel sick. But I can be just as obstinate as either of you."

At the laboratory door, Dr. Montague said, "We must pass in quickly. If there is a Biogen still living within, we must confine it here. I do not conceive the possibility; but if it chanced that our earth temperature was not destructive to such forms of life, an escape out into the open might be disastrous."

"There is this other possibility," Ruth said, with a trace of bitterness, "that a form of life so immaterial can easily penetrate where it will. You could no more confine it than you could air."

Dr. Montague said, "I had forgotten that. Still, it can do no harm to take precautions. Now, King. . . ."

They passed inside quickly, and King at once closed the door. The day was dull, and the interior was shrouded in gloom. Ruth shivered as she moved to put up the window-blinds.

"Well, you see," Dr. Montague said, half in disappointment, "there is nothing here. I had hoped for at least semi-materialization. The remaining culture is intact. That is something."

"There was nothing to see last night," King warned. "Yet the outcome was not altogether a pleasant one."

The reproof went unnoticed. It was evident that Dr. Montague had no interest, at the moment, beyond the research itself. He had taken the sixth tube from its sling, and was holding it to the light of a window.

He muttered, "Extraordinary. Ruth, my dear, you will never see a more perfect example of the phenomenon of fluorescence. The radiations are undoubtedly excited by an unusual energy. The presence of uranium nitrate, of course—"

With Ruth at his elbow, King observed the culture in the scientist's hand. It appeared to him that the smokelike contents had thickened—he had almost said, solidified—overnight. At any rate, a change was distinctly discernible. The gas, or substance, revolved at an enor-

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mous rate. It was more like a spiral nebula than before. It had acquired, now, a strong phosphorescence.

IN UTTER darkness, King could well imagine it giving out light of considerable dimensions.

Dr. Montague replaced the tube gently.

He said, "I have a remarkable feeling about this culture. I believe it to be evolving life of an entirely different mode —both as to mind and matter—to that of the other cultures. I cannot say why I think this, unless it is the purity and sheer beauty of the growth. It is without doubt an isolated and individual star germ; a culture of pure chance."

King was steadily gaining confidence. Nothing untoward had greeted their entry of the laboratory. There had, he concluded, with a feeling of guilt, evidently been only a single star germ, or Biogen. He had witnessed its escape, and the laboratory was without present threat. At least, so he conceived it. He said as much, in a reassuring whisper, to Ruth.

"The Biogen, as your father hinted, must have dissolved—died. Otherwise, surely we should have known of it by this time."

"Do you think so?" Ruth said hopefully. But immediately her face clouded again. "No, Rod; I can still *feel* something—a sort of presence, that isn't normally here. Honestly, can't you?" She was frowning.

"Perhaps I can," King admitted.

She gave a bleak smile. "Do Biogens sleep, Rod? Perhaps it's asleep. Or perhaps it's just watching us and laughing."

"Well," King said, falling in with her mood, "I don't know about sleeping. But I have it on unimpeachable authority that Biogens never laugh. You see, they have nothing to laugh with."

But in spite of the attempt at jocularity, both knew a growing depression. Dr. Montague, however, appeared entirely unimpressed by the surroundings. He trotted here and there briskly.

Presently he announced himself as satisfied.

"Well, there's nothing more we can do. I am inclined to think that what star germs there are here—I assume that all five cultures produced at least one living embryo—are so infinitesimally small, as yet, as to be quite negligible for harm. All, that is, with the exception of the Biogen which we encountered last night. As to that, any one of a dozen sequels is possible. It may have dissolved and returned to the chaos from which it sprang. It may only function in the darkness. That seems the more likely. We must see when night comes."

"From the outside of the window," King said dryly. "I can hardly suppose you intend to venture inside the laboratory after dark. I certainly have no ambition in that quarter."

"Why, I think it safe enough—" Dr. Montague began.

Ruth interrupted, in a tense voice, "You shall not. I never heard of such preposterous flouting of common sense."

"My dear," Dr. Montague exclaimed, frowning.

"You shall not," Ruth repeated vehemently. "I am not a child. I stand in my mother's place, and I forbid you to endanger yourself in such foolhardy fashion. Father, you must give me your promise that you will not enter the laboratory in the night time. Otherwise—"

"Otherwise?" Dr. Montague asked quizzically.

Ruth said deliberately, "Otherwise I give you my word that I will destroy every culture in the place. And Rod will help me."

King nodded.

"Indeed!" Dr. Montague said. "Indeed!"

But presently his irritation at this unusual opposition left him. He shrugged his shoulders resignedly.

"So I'm to be bullied, am I— Very well, I promise. At least for the time being. At the same time, I think you are entirely in the wrong."

HE LEFT them sulkily at the door of the sitting room and marched into the open.

"In some ways, you know," Ruth said to King, "he's just like a spoiled boy. But his anger never lasts long. He's an old dear. Rod, what are we to do now?"

King took her elbow and led her into the freshness of the veranda.

"Very little, I'm afraid. We can only await events. Very likely nothing unpleasant will happen at all. We always overestimate danger, I think. The whole business is so grotesque that it's hard to realize it. You're not frightened still?"

"A little," she said.

"I'll tell you what," King said. He lit a cigarette and inhaled deeply. "I'll send Fry over to the cottage for my things. I'll sleep at Red Gates until the scare is over. No, you mustn't look so grateful. It's as much for my sake as for yours. I should

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never know a second of peace, otherwise. It's impossible to leave you at the mercy of this sort of thing."

Ruth pressed his arm. "You're so good to me, Rod."

"Who wouldn't be? King said, flushing. "You know how I feel, Ruth. . . ."

She smiled almost gently.

"So that's all fixed. Now I'll find Fry. And later I'll have a ramble over the house, if you don't mind."

"The empty part, Rod?"

He said evasively, "I want to describe something of the kind, you see. There's a huge empty house figuring in the book I'm writing. You'll be able to read all about it, and see how near my descriptions come to the real thing."

He found Fry and Joe Murgle busy in the garden. The latter grinned at him ingenuously, as who should say, "Behold, my comrade in the arms of adventure."

"Well, Joe," King said. "Quite recovered."

Joe nodded. "Yes, Mr. King, I had the wind up. But you bet I ain't the kind to stay scared. Ghosts ain't anything."

"Ghosts!" Fry ejaculated. "Stuff and nonesuch. Lying young 'ound."

"Didn't we see 'em, Mr. King?" Joe appealed eagerly. "And one of 'em shot at me. As true as I'm here."

King said maliciously, with a regretful shake of the head, "I'm sorry, Joe, but the report you heard was only one of Dr. Montague's tubes bursting."

"There!" Fry exclaimed, with triumphant gusto. His black head waggled derisively. "What did I say? Lying young—"

"I want you to fetch some things from my cottage, Fry," King intervened. He avoided Joe Murgle's reproachful gaze. "You know where it is? Take this key. You'll find a suitcase somewhere. Bring that. And my shaving things from the bathroom."

Fry nodded, spat on his hands, and departed.

King turned once more to Joe. "Sorry to let you down just then, Joe. But I had to get something for my ten shillings. I'm going for a ramble over the empty portion of the house. Like to come?"

"Will you go into that tower?" Joe asked eagerly.

"I daresay. Why the tower particularly?"

"I like towers," Joe explained. "I've had my eye up there, Mr. King, ever since I come here. Towers is rum things. I never been in a tower before."

King laughed. "Well, come on. You shall see this one."

THE architects of Red Gates had evidently been fascinated by the endless possibilities of corridors and short staircases. One or other appeared upon the least excuse. Passageways ran here and there in aimless confusion, and staircases of two or three steps only began everywhere and ended nowhere. The latter, King conceived, were intended to be in the nature of decoration, for they were obviously of no practical use.

For the most part the stairways terminated in a short landing below a window. There were three exceptions. One gave access to a wide cellar in the basement, a second led to an upper story, and a third connected with the tower room. Out of this room a short, straight ladder climbed to the tower itself.

The house was single-storied except for the middle wing, from which rose the tower. The upper story was entirely vacant. The floors here were thick with the dust of unoccupied years. Spiderwebs festooned the ceilings and the window-panes were glazed with grime. Otherwise, the rooms were in good shape and could have been made habitable at short notice.

There were nine rooms in the upper story—four on each side of the corridor, and the tower room opening at the end of the corridor. The blinds were drawn in all the rooms so that the whole area was shrouded in semidarkness.

King found it difficult to imagine the light and laughter with which the place had once no doubt been flooded.

King had conferred upon Joe Murgle the role of candle bearer. He himself had kept both his hands free.

The exact purpose of the exploration was not very clear, even to him. He was actuated by a hazy idea that the Biogen might possibly have escaped into the unoccupied portion of the building; in which case it would be well to know it. Yet even now, with all the evidences of what had taken place, his common sense revolted.

It outraged his reason to believe that Dr. Montague's researches had, in sober fact, produced living entities from another world. But at the back of his mind he knew that it was so. And his subconsciousness never ceased to urge extreme caution.

It pricked his senses to an unusual alertness, warning him that he had to deal with an altogether unearthly opponent.

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In case of attack it was well, then, that he should not be hampered in any way. He felt competent to defend Joe as well as himself, provided his hands were free.

In the pocket of his sport coat was Dr. Montague's automatic, which he had obtained ostensibly for the purpose of cleaning. He was a good deal doubtful, however, of its efficacy in defense against so immaterial an enemy as a Biogen. The hard feel of the weapon was reassuring, nonetheless.

At the entrance to the corridor, King halted.

He said, "Well, Joe, what do you think of it? Pretty stuffy, eh?"

"It is so, Mr. King," said Joe. The hand that held the candle wobbled slightly. "Jane wouldn't like this."

He wagged his head.

"Who's Jane?" King asked, forgetting the Murgle family tree. "And why wouldn't she like it?"

"Jane's my eldest sister. I've got two sisters—Jane and little Hermie. Jane's nearly seventeen, and little Hermie is nearly two. There's six of us altogether. There's Dad and Mum and—"

King interrupted, "But why wouldn't Jane like these rooms?"

"She believes in ghosts," Joe confided. But somehow his smile of scorn wasn't very convincing. "Silly things, girls. Jane says ghosts boil you and count your bones. She's always saying things like that because it scares Horrie and makes him yell, and then father gets wild."

"She seems to be a most engaging young lady," King said.

"Jane says they drink your blood—"

King said, a trifle brusquely, "Put those blinds up, Joe, but don't open the windows. Never mind Jane."

They went slowly from room to room. In every case, they found emptiness and silence. The atmosphere was dank and depressing but without threat. King's spirits rose as the minutes went by. Everything appeared entirely normal. If the Biogen actually was there, their senses discerned no trace of it.

As they aproached the closed door of the tower room, Joe voiced a new thought. "Are we looking for something, Mr. King?"

"Of course not," King said quickly. "We're just rambling around. "Why?"

Joe said, astoundingly, "I thought perhaps it was a goat or something."

"A what?"

"A goat," Joe repeated stoutly. "I thought there might be a goat, you see, Mr. King, because doctors have guinea pigs and frogs and rabbits and things to chop up and look at, don't they?"

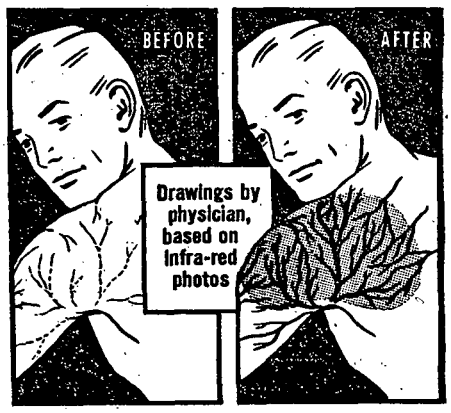
King said, staring, "Look here, Joe, what's the matter with you? What would a goat be doing in the house? And why a goat? Are you trying to be funny?"

"No, I'm not, Mr. King. Only, I couldn't think what else it would be. I thought perhaps the doctor's goat had got away, and we were looking for it."

"You *are* trying to be funny," King insisted. He took Joe by the shoulders, half in anger. "Or else— Now just what made you think we were looking for a goat? Come on, now?"

Joe wriggled free. He pointed back down the corridor. In an aggrieved voice he said, "I smelled goats or something a bit ago, when I come out of that other room. You know the way they smell."

WITH a curious tightening of the scalp, King suddenly remembered the foetid, elemental stench which for one sharp second had assailed his nostrils as he sprang to catch Dr. Montague's crumpling



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body in the laboratory. Ruth, he recollected, had spoken of an animal smell, out of her own experience.

King laughed uncomfortably. "You're a bright lad. Doesn't the whole place smell musty and unpleasant? That's all there is to it, Joe. Is it likely, now, that a goat would be allowed inside the house itself—unless it's yourself—"

"I don't make tracks like them," Joe said, a little sullenly.

"Tracks!" King exclaimed.

The idea of looking for tracks had never occurred to him. One would not expect visible traces of so immaterial a creature as a Biogen. Consequently, he was startled, as his eyes followed the line of Joe's pointing finger, to observe for the first time a series of impressions on the dusty boards, distinctly apart from their own footmarks.

He went slowly to make examination, aware of a dryness in his mouth and a prickling of his skin. He saw outlined in the greasy dust the clear imprints of a small, cloven foot. The discovery was so utterly perplexing that he felt himself doubting his eyesight.

Joe possibly sensed something of the momentary panic of King's thought, for there was a hoarseness in his whispered inquiry.

"Ain't it all right, Mr. King?"

King, with an effort, regained his wits. Joe's eyes were on him queerly, and he hastened to keep the boy's mind free from the dread which assailed his own.

"Why, you were right, after all, Joe, by the look of it. But these are old tracks, I should say. The grease sticks, you see. Very likely when the house was quite empty a goat or a calf wandered into the place. . . ."

"They're not old, they're new," Joe said disconcertingly. He nodded proudly at his own shrewdness. "Jane and I used to track deer and things, when we lived in the country before father got a job in town. We got to know a lot about fresh tracks and stale tracks."

King's heart was thumping. "How do you know these tracks are fresh?"

"Because they cut in over your own," Joe said. "You were up here not long ago, you said, Mr. King. Well, see where the hoof has rubbed out the edge of your bootmark—this one here where the dust has settled again?"

"I see. Stupid of me," King said.

He drew a deep breath. After all, he told himself, it was not beyond the bounds of possibility that there had been a goat on the premises at one time. In the early days of his friendship with Ruth and her father he had known very little of their work.

There had, he knew, been certain inoculatory experiments upon guinea pigs, in connection with a fever virus in which Dr. Montague was interested. He resolved to question Fry quietly at the first opportunity, and in the meantime to dismiss the matter from his mind.

He said, "Why, Joe, you're quite a bushman. After all, this doesn't matter in the least. You bet I know what a goat smells like. I used to run into them on the dumps on the old diggings, when I was in West Australia. It's the sort of smell that stays right behind, too. Now I think we'll have a look at the tower room. Don't let that candle go out."

He turned the handle of the tower room door, as he spoke. To his annoyance, however, it appeared to be locked.

He turned to the boy.

"Confound the thing. Joe, run down and ask Mrs. Puckett for the key. Or Miss Ruth, if you can find her."

When he was left to himself, King's thoughts returned to the cloven hoofmark, but he pushed it aside resolutely. He determined that he would not allow himself to speculate about it until he had questioned Fry.

Mrs. Puckett's voice, calling from the foot of the stairs, roused him. He went to the landing.

"What is it, Mrs. Puckett?"

"The tower room ain't locked, Mr. King. Fry was up there yesterday, cleaning out the leads in the flat roof."

"He must have locked it after him, for some reason," King retorted. "Anyway, it's locked now."

"But it can't be," said Mrs. Puckett. "There's no key to it, Mr. King. We tried all the keys when we first come here, and none of 'em fitted. Very likely the door's caught in the jamb. Shall I come up and see?"

"No, thanks. I'll manage," King said. "Is Joe there? Joe, bring a broom with you." He said, as Joe appeared, "Just give those tracks a smudge over. They don't look quite the thing inside a house, do they?"

But to himself, he said, watching the youth at work, "It would never do for Ruth to come on that cloven hoof."

Presently, with Joe again holding the candle, King made a further attempt to

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force the tower room door. But he could not budge it an inch. He began to have an odd feeling that something or someone beyond was deliberately holding the door shut against him.

"Fry *must* have locked it," Joe Murgle said.

King finally gave up. He was determined, however, to see inside the room. There was something in all this that he did not understand.

"We'll try a window, I think," he told Joe.

On three sides of the tower ran a flat roof-ledge. This King regarded dubiously from the window of the left-hand corridor room. One needed to be something of an acrobat, he decided, to negotiate so narrow a path in safety.

Careful scrutiny of the surroundings failed to disclose any handhold. He had the merest glimpse of one of the tower room windows. These were, as he knew from the ground perspective, tall and narrow and arched at the top. However, one might squeeze through, provided the glass was not a fixture.

The problem was to reach the window itself.

While he still debated, Joe spoke at his elbow.

"Let me try, Mr. King. I could get along the gutters. . . ."

"Too risky. What would what's-her-name—er—little Hermie, say, if you broke your neck?"

"But I could. I don't ever get giddy like some people. I'd go on my hands and knees."

"Well," King said, "if you promise to be careful. I'd go myself, only the ledge wouldn't hold the weight. Go easy now. . . ."

He helped Joe cautiously across the sill.

"Don't look down. Hug the wall tight. Sure you can do it?"

"Yes! Of course I can," Joe called excitedly.

It was not until the boy was out of sight around the angle of the tower wall, that King suddenly felt a pang of conscience. He had forgot altogether the possibility of harm at the instance of the Biogen, supposing the creature to be within the tower room. He swore softly under his breath.

"Joe—come back. I've decided it doesn't matter. Can you hear me?"

Apparently, since there was no reply, Joe could not. King's shouts were unavailing. He waited in silence, his gaze upon the fraction of tower window where Joe, if successful, must eventually appear. He was getting nervous when the boy's hand came into view across the coping. It was followed by his head and shoulders.

King shouted between cupped hands, "If the window won't open, kick the glass in. It won't matter. You can't get back so easily."

Joe's face, he saw, was now on a level with the glass. He was, beyond a doubt, able to see into the tower room. King began to wonder at the sudden immobility of the boy's body. One hand remained poised aloft; stiffened, as it might have been, in the act of taking a fresh hold. His head seemed to sag.

King cried, "Joe!"

The answer came in a single terrified scream. It was followed by the sound of smashing glass. To King's alarmed imagination it appeared that the boy's body was enveloped in a kind of fog that poured from an unseen gap in the window. The fog swelled and became rigid. It reminded him horribly of a great suffocating pile of cotton wool.

CHAPTER IV

TERROR BELOW STAIRS

KING'S fear snapped suddenly. He turned and ran back into the corridor, shouting as he went. As he tumbled headlong, he collided with Fry, who appeared from the stairhead.

King stammered, "The key! Have you brought the key?"

"There's no key," the gardener said. He stared stupidly at King. "Mrs. Puckett told me, and I come up. The door ain't ever been locked."

Thrusting him aside, King, on an impulse, tried the handle. To his astonishment the door opened instantly. It fell inward, almost causing him to lose his balance a second time.

Joe Murgle was on the floor immediately below the broken window. He lay on his back, the blood from a cut cheek trickling in a thin stream of scarlet over the china-white of his face.

King, with pulses hammering, cried sharply, "Fry, take his feet. Quick. Out into the corridor. Never mind the door."

"What 'appened?" Fry mumbled, as they began to descend the stairs. "Young 'ound's been climbing again, and fell in the window, I know. . . ."

"That's it," King said. He caught at

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the half truth gladly. "That it is, Fry. Steady."

Ruth came upon them as they carried Joe into the open air. Her eyes dilated.

"Oh, Rod. . . . How did it happen? Is he hurt badly?"

"He's all right, I think," King said. "Cut himself a bit and fainted. He overbalanced and fell through one of the tower windows. Where's Mrs. Puckett?"

Joe's eyelids quivered. The housekeeper, bending over him, said, "I think he'll come to in a minute. I'll get some 'ot water. The pore boy."

Fry, chewing at his straggly beard, mumbled, "Young 'ound. Always climbing. I can't turn me back a second."

"I wish you'd turn it now," Mrs. Puckett declared, with flashing eyes. "Hairy old hape—"

King said, interrupting the gardener's gloomy retort "Fry, I want you. I want to have a look over the tower room. Come on."

The door was wide open, as they had left it, and he entered with almost a swagger. He was surprised to find that he had no fear for the Presence which he believed still to be lurking in the angles veiled with shadow. His fighting blood was fully roused and the prospect of an encounter brought him only a savage satisfaction.

"Fine mess, I must say," Fry grumbled.

Glass from the shattered window lay everywhere. It was extraordinary, King thought, surveying it, that Joe had escaped so lightly.

"That's easily mended. That trap over the ladder, Fry. Is it open?"

Without waiting an answer he climbed the ladder rapidly. A swift thrust of his hand dislodged the trap. He mounted recklessly, his anger careless of anything that might await him. Nothing occurred, however. The narrow enclosure of the tower proper was empty and silent.

King, with a feeling of disappointment, descended to the tower room. He found Fry still contemplating the damage.

"What was you looking for?" the gardener demanded curiously.

"Birds' nests," King said. Fry was an unpleasant person at best, and his present attitude disgusted King thoroughly. "Here—take the rooms on the right. Look in each as you go by. I'll take those on the left."

"Birds' nests?" Fry mumbled, as he shambled away.

King ignored the comment. He found himself with a malicious wish that Fry might discover the Biogen for himself, at close quarters. But this satisfaction was denied him. The rooms were gone through without incident.

He dismissed the gardener curtly when they reached the ground floor. Fry, he decided, was getting on his nerves. At first he had thought him merely stupid and pessimistic. He began now to suspect him of downright malice. Fry, he told himself ill-temperedly, would be no loss to anyone.

But he could hardly have foreseen at the time with what completeness his own uncharity would be met.

Dr. Montague and Ruth were with Joe on the veranda. The boy was pale, but otherwise himself. He greeted King with a sickly grin.

"You're all right?" King said anxiously.

Dr. Montague, looking unusually grave, said, "Yes, he's all right, King. No bones broken, and fortunately the cuts are slight. I should say he's suffering principally from shock."

King nodded and gave Joe a pat on the shoulder.

Ruth said quickly, "Poor Joe fancies he saw a ghost, Rod. I must tell Mrs. Puckett to give him less plum pudding. Why, Joe, you know perfectly well there isn't any such thing as a real ghost. How they would laugh at you at home, if they heard of it."

"Jane wouldn't. Jane's frightfully keen on ghosts," the Murgle heir defended weakly. But his assurance seemed to waver before their smiling scorn. "Well, maybe it weren't a ghost, after all," he said.

"A ghost in broad daylight, Joe!" King scoffed. "That's a bit hot, isn't it? I was watching you the whole time. Your hold slipped and you fell against the window and broke it. That's all there was to it."

"Yes, I know," Joe agreed doubtfully.

King said, with affected reproach, "Just fancy trying to put one over on us like that. Well, go on resting for a while, Joe. You've done enough for one day."

SECURE from observation in the sitting room, however, the faces of all three sobered. King said, "Just what did Joe see?"

He glanced from Dr. Montague to Ruth. She had been studying her father's face, but now she met King's eyes and shook her head hopelessly.

"How can we know?" she said in a low voice. "Of course, Joe was terrified; his imagination may have got away from him, but—"

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"I begin to feel uneasy, King," Dr. Montague confessed. His eyes were worried. "I did not foresee anything like this. Frankly, I don't like it. The boy appears to have encountered a Biogen which has apparently escaped from the laboratory, and is now in the tower, or thereabouts. I say a Biogen. But when I consider, King, it is possible we have to do not with one star germ, but with a number. My own encounter may have no relation to the boy's experience."

"What was his experience?"

Dr. Montague sighed. "He says that when he looked in at the window of the tower room, a kind of green mist gathered behind the glass. It frightened him. He heard you calling to him, and he tried to answer. But he says he couldn't make a sound. All he could do was to watch this mist. It appeared to grow and become solid, in some way that he cannot explain. And then the window burst and this solid mist—which he says had turned white—spread itself all over him.

"He felt himself being dragged through the gap in the window, and he found his voice and screamed. He describes his sensations as being akin to what he imagines it would be like to be smothered in dough."

"As to that," King said, "I saw the substance cover him. It was white and greasy looking. Like dirty cotton wool."

"Yes," Dr. Montague said. "I think there is little doubt it was the remarkable protoplasmic manifestation which bears the name of ectosarc. Spiritualists speak of it as ectoplasm, in relation to a certain substance supposed to be projected from the human body during trance. On that point I know nothing."

He broke off abruptly and his face quivered. He said, "King, I begin to be afraid. One moment. Do not misunderstand me. I am not afraid for myself: I was never less afraid on my own account than I am at this moment. But I am afraid for—shall I say, the world? Terrible possibilities occur to me. Suppose these intelligences are able to multiply on earth! It is idle to deny that such as we have encountered so far are nakedly evil. What have I done?"

So anguished was his cry that Ruth was quick to comfort him.

"Father, that's nonsense, of course. You said yourself that earth temperatures were almost certain to prove fatal to any form of laboratory life. The Biogen is possibly already dead."

King caught her swift glance and said, "Yes, that seems logical."

"On the contrary," Dr. Montague said hoarsely, "all the evidence points to its rapid adjustment to earth conditions. The most elementary forms—such as the spiderlike nucleus which young Murgle first saw, and which he described as a tangle of string—will in all probability expire early. But the higher forms of cosmical life may survive indefinitely. The process of adjustment will be slow necessarily, because of the entirely new conditions. They are at present, as we may say, feeling their way slowly to the fullness of their power. An evil power, King. One must admit that. The apotheosis of wickedness."

In an attempt to distract Dr. Montague from too serious a viewpoint, King returned the conversation to the experience of Joe Murgle.

He suggested, "We ought to make some allowances for Joe's youthful terror, don't you think? For example, I have no doubt that he himself was responsible for the breaking of the window. The glass fell inward, not outward. It was the pressure of his body that did the mischief. In a sense, he was hypnotized."

Doctor Montague was frowning.

"I think so, too," Ruth said. "Joe's imagination undoubtedly has colored his story."

They both were watching Dr. Montague closely. His thin, pale face was drawn with worry and fatigue, and his hands played nervously on the arms of his chair. Now he leaned forward suddenly, without meeting their eyes.

"It scarcely matters," Dr. Montague said. "The star germs are realities. If we can confine them to the house, there is hope that we may find some means to destroy them. Fortunately, it is winter. But when summer comes. . . ."

Ruth said gently, "We must not anticipate evil. Let us endeavor to discover the nature of this star life. Surely it cannot be as immaterial as it seems."

"My dear, you give me fresh hope," the scientist said. He lifted his head confidently. "Yes, we must do that."

"It is a matter for religion and philosophy," Ruth said. "If there is a remedy it is in these, not in further research. On no account must the laboratory be entered under present conditions. You agree to that?"

Dr. Montague nodded.

"I was afraid that you would not," Ruth

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said. "And that would have been indescribably foolish. We have to deal with mind stuff, you see. It is a question of our minds against theirs. It even occurs to me that this planetary life could not exist if our minds had not first conceived it."

"That is a daring hypothesis," Dr. Montague said. But his look was full of admiration. "But I take your meaning. In other words, the Biogen is as much a thought projection from our minds, as we ourselves are thought projections of the mind of the infinite. And yet we cannot deny ourselves."

"No, but the infinite could deny us," Ruth said quietly. "We should then cease to be. Let us deny the Biogen, and perhaps *it* will cease to be."

King said, "I can't follow so deep an excursion into metaphysics. I pin my faith to time and temperature."

He made an effort to smile, and relapsed into silence. For moments afterward the three of them sat there staring at each other. Ruth's face wrinkled with a frown.

At last her father made an abrupt movement and nodded quickly at King, as if he had come to a decision.

"Tonight, we will endeavor to establish Ruth's theory, nevertheless," Dr. Montague said. "I thank God for the thought."

WITH the resilience of youth, Joe Murgle was quickly restored to his normal well-being. True, his cut cheek was painful, and for some hours the restriction in his chest continued; otherwise, in a physical sense, he had undergone no great harm. Mentally, however, the case was different. The experience had terrified him.

In spite of King's jibing, Joe felt that he had been face to face, for the second time, with influences very nearly approaching to Jane's definition of a ghost. In the few horrible instants preceding his merciful lapse into unconsciousness, when he believed himself to be slowly suffocating beneath the pressure of some enveloping, doughlike substance, he had almost felt the blood draining from his body. His blood was being drunk, as it had seemed. His bones were on the verge of being boiled. He had uttered that one despairing scream of mortal anguish, and then had known no more until he found himself in safety on the veranda.

The impression faded during the day. With the coming of night, it began to revive. But he was pluckily prepared to do his best in any further encounter.

A flesh-and-blood enemy, he could have understood, but his chief uneasiness came from the fact that there was nothing on which his mind could take hold. His courage was bolstered up, however, by an incurable curiosity. He felt himself the center of a whirlpool of extraordinary adventure, and would not for worlds have deserted his post.

There were, also, certain monetary considerations which could not be despised. In his pocket reposed a second ten-shilling note, the outcome of King's tender conscience. More toys for little Hermie loomed on his mental horizon, not to mention some slight token of regard for Mrs. Puckett's niece; the last a boldness which he had long contemplated. Upon the whole, therefore, Joe was satisfied enough.

Nonetheless, he hugged the kitchen fire closely when night fell. The dullness of the day had turned to bitter, driving rain, and the wind made uncanny music overhead. He tried not to listen to it.

Paper and ink were on the table before him and he sat planning the letter he would presently write to his mother, descriptive of his own enormous share in the latest developments of life at Red Gates. For the moment, however, he could not concentrate upon the task, congenial though it was.

While awaiting inspiration he became spectator of the nightly game of checkers in progress between Mrs. Puckett and Fry. In utter violation of all precedent Mrs. Puckett maintained an almost continuous fire of conversation. The truth was that even her placidity was not proof against the atmosphere of mystery which had come to Red Gates.

She sensed its threat, while having only a confused notion of its origin. She understood that something had interfered with the work in the laboratory. Some tubes had burst, and Dr. Montague had been taken ill.

There seemed to be some doubt as to the cause of these happenings, yet neither could really be said to be unnatural. Tubes, according to Mrs. Puckett's philosophy, would go on bursting as long as the world lasted, and people would go on being ill.

The unnatural part, to her mind, was the investing of these trivial incidents with a significance out of all just proportion. Mrs. Puckett had caught a word here and there, and had intercepted certain looks and emotions, on the part of her employers, which had a yeastlike effect upon her mind.

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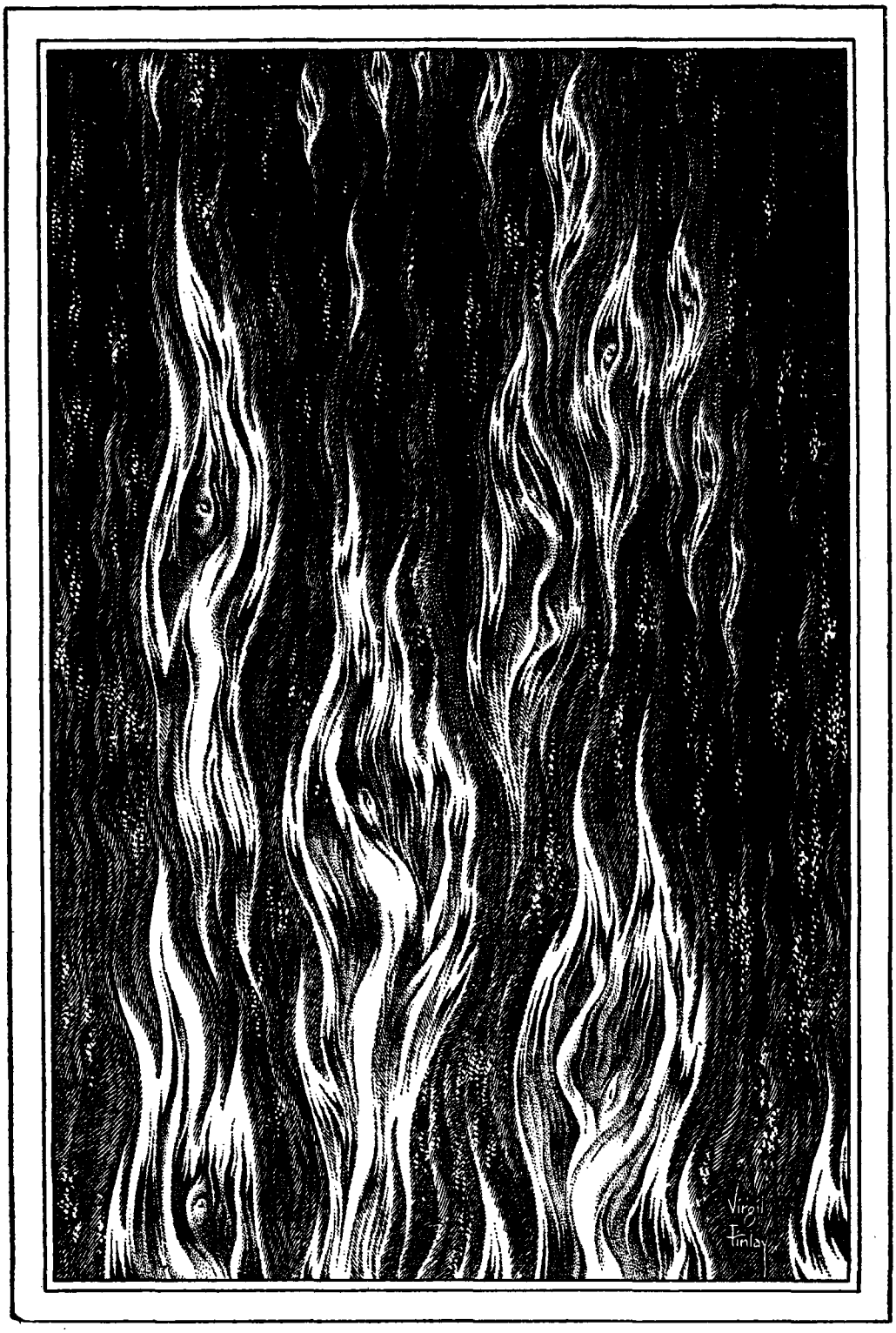

The strange Flame-biogen danced grotesquely. . . .

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Her stolidity had, as it were, started to ferment. She scoffed outwardly at the idea of the supernatural, but inwardly she experienced a delicious quaking. Like most women, she could deny and affirm in the same breath.

Joe Murgle's darkly uttered boastings of ghostly encounter were weighed in the same balance as the gloomy scoffings of Fry. The resultant mental mixture produced in Mrs. Puckett a condition akin to that which would conceivably follow the simultaneous swallowing of a poison and its antidote. The most alarming symptom was a steadily increasing garrulity.

Fry, whose black fingernails might charitably be supposed merely as heavy mourning for the tactical blunder which he had just committed, sat crushed by the volume of Mrs. Puckett's words. His mouth was half open, as though to the weight of the hand that clung to his straggling black beard. Defeat stared him in the face and his ill-humor was evident.

He said, as Mrs. Puckett paused for breath, "I tell you what it is. How can a man consecrate on games when there's all this talk of germs and things?"

"And what about me?" Mrs. Puckett crowned a king with vicious energy. "Don't I 'ear it? And don't I have to concentrate, too? Mind, I'm only asking. You don't have to answer."

"You're a woman," Fry snarled. He bit his nails at the loss of two more men.

"I like that," said Mrs. Puckett. "I do indeed. You're a woman, he says. Well, and what else would I be? Answer me that? Would I be a man if I could? I would not. Leastwise, if I was I wouldn't 'ave no whiskers. I'd save up and buy a razor. You have to take me, Fry."

"I don't *'ave* to," the gardener protested.

"If you don't I'll 'uff you," Mrs. Puckett said. "That's right. Now it's my move again. And *that's* right. Were you ever married, Fry?"

"More brains," Fry mumbled.

"Wanted," Mrs. Puckett finished nastily. "More brains wanted, Fry. Well, it's been a mercy for some woman. Well now, tell me. What's this Biogen that Miss Ruth's been talking about? A Biogen? What's a Biogen?"

"I'm a gardener," Fry said, "but I know that."

The housekeeper regarded his leer with disfavor. "Well, what is it?"

"It's a thing," Fry said, "that they makes moving pictures with."

"You're thinking of a biograph," said Mrs. Puckett. "A Biogen is a sort of bug. It's something alive. It's your move."

Fry said, "If you ask me, the whole thing is a bug. Silly behavior. Has anyone seen anything? No, they 'aven't. And not likely to."

"Joe here has seen something," Mrs. Puckett said. "Didn't you, Joe?"

"Mr. Fry won't have it," Joe complained. "But I did. Twice I've seen something. I've seen a thing like a bunch of string, and I've seen a thing like a fog."

"Young 'ound!" Mr. Fry breathed spitefully. "He's making it up. Has anyone else seen this here string or this here fog? No, they ain't. And never will."

"It near strangled me, anyhow," Joe said.

"Don't you mind him, Joe," Mrs. Puckett encouraged. She herded the Fry army towards a corner of the board. "He's jealous because Mr. King gave you that ten-shilling note. I saw him watching you. It's your move."

Fry almost howled, "I can't move. You know I can't move. What's the good of telling me it's my move, when you've won the game?"

"Because I wanted to make you admit it," Mrs. Puckett said. "And now you have."

FRY'S expression was lost to Joe, who was bending at last to the effort of correspondence. A new nib was in his pen, and his tongue already lolled in the throes of composition. Presently there arose a scratching sound indicative of the sensational communication which Mr. Murgle was next evening to interpret aloud in the bosom of his family:

"Dear Mum:

Mr. Fry's in a terrible wax becos Mrs. Puckett's beaten him at checkers. Fry only had to men left and Mrs. Puckett had four kings and three men. And Fry said you always win there's no fun playing with someone who always wins. And Mrs. Puckett said well I didn't ask you to play did I. And Fry said yes you did. And Mrs. Puckett said well what if I did. This is a free country. And Fry went out and slammed the door.

Oh mum my face is all cut. They thought I would bleed to death but I managed not to. Tell Jane I am all right but my sore cheek and a headache.

Oh mum you should have seen me. Mr. King said would you like to climb to the tower window you are the only one I will trust Joe. And I said of course I will. Becos you see mum the door of the tower room was locked and Mrs. Puckett said

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it is never locked becos there is not any key. And so we could not get inside.

And so I climbed on the roof and went to get in the tower window.

Well mum there was a sort of fog there and all of a sudden the window broke and the fog came out. I was not afrade of course but it was a terrible feeling all the same.

I called out to Mr. King it is all right I am not afrade. And he said I know Joe I wish I had your courage. But after a terrible struggle the fog went away and I fell through the window and cut my face. They thought I would bleed to death but I am glad to say it stopped in time.

Well mum Miss Ruth thinks there is a Biogen in the house it is a sort of a bug Mrs. Puckett says. Mrs. Puckett says it is all very misterious Joe and we must be on our guard. I am glad there is a man like you in the house Joe it makes me feel safer.

Well mum here is another ten shillings that Mr. King gave me he said you are one in a thousand Joe. You can buy something for little Hermie if you like. But I would like a tortershell comb for Emily becos she likes tortershell. You could send it in your next letter.

Your loving son Joe.

P.S. Tell Jane she is right about ghosts I have seen several. I am not afrade of them.

Joe Murgle."

DR. MONTAGUE was never so happy as when building some theoretical edifice upon known and approved facts. He was thus occupied now; thin legs crossed, he sat by the fire; his chin cupped in one hand, and hair slightly awry; his eyes fixed on the leaping flames in rapt abstraction.

His uneasiness was for the time being completely forgotten in imaginative flight. He spoke in a low voice. He was breaking ground, now, that was new to Ruth herself, and she listened eagerly. King smoked silently in the depths of an armchair.

Ruth said, during a pause, "You think then, Father, that the star germs are from planets forming our sun's inner family?"

"I have small doubt of it. From Venus, Mars, Mercury, or the Moon—arranging them in order of magnitude."

"The moon?"

"Why not? So far as her path is concerned, she may be taken as being a planet. She is the smallest of the family, but her dimensions are by no means insignificant. She has a surface about as large as Australia and Africa together. Under the telescope the moon appears as an arid, waterless globe covered with mountain ranges and pitted with enormous craters. So far as can be judged, she has no air.

"It must be remembered, however, that we can only see a little more than half of her entire surface, since but one portion of her turns earthwards.

"There may be lunar inhabitants on the unseen surface. If so—and this applies to the other planets—they must be a class of beings unlike ourselves."

Dr. Montague frowned and continued, "Of this inner circle, Mars and Venus probably support some form of life. Venus is approximately as large as Terra—that is, our own earth. She has no moon, but being nearer to the sun than we are, she receives proportionately more light and heat. Almost twice as much, in fact.

"This temperature is far too great to sustain life as we know it on earth. But ours is not necessarily the only possible form of life. Proctor, for example, declared that he had little doubt there were living creatures in Venus, although he could not conceive what manner of creatures they might be.

"Venus is known as Hesperus, the star of the evening. Her influences, astrologically considered, are for human good. She is surpassingly beautiful, in view of her small size.

"Jupiter, over a thousand times greater in volume, is far inferior in brightness. And Sirius, greater than Jupiter by more than one thousand millions of times, shines far less brightly than Venus. If light denotes goodness, as we believe, then we may expect the inhabitants of so magnificent an orb as Venus to be angels of light, indeed."

"We know more of Mars," Ruth suggested.

"Thanks to Lowell," Dr. Montague said, "we know most about Mars. We know that he receives only about half as much light and heat as we do, because he travels next to the earth on the outside, or away from the sun.

"He is the smallest of all the planets except Mercury, and like Venus, he has no moon.

"Our oceans exceed our continents almost three times. On Mars, water and land are about equally divided. He most resembles our earth, yet certainly is incapable of supporting any form of terrestrial life."

King asked "What of the big fellows? Jupiter, and so on?"

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"Jupiter is a miniature sun, over a thousand times larger than our earth in volume, and some three hundred times greater in mass. If there are Jovians—which is unlikely—they do their courting in the light of five moons. It is, indeed, likely that neither Jupiter nor Saturn have any solid globe at all.

"At any rate, nothing fixed has ever been recognized through the dense atmosphere surrounding them. No, whatever form of life has been evolved in my laboratory must come from one, perhaps all, of the inner planets. We shall never know, I fear."

"It seems to me," King said, "that it scarcely matters where the things come from, once they are here. After all, we haven't actually *seen* anything much. It's possible, isn't it, that the number is less than our uneasiness supposes? What I mean is, that all our encounters may have been with one and the same Biogen, in the different stages of its growth and development."

Ruth said, shivering a little, "In that case, Rod, why don't we find it visible always? Why should we see it one time, and the next time only feel it, or smell it? No; there are a number of the creatures."

"I think so," Dr. Montague said. "Possibly a dozen different forms of life from a dozen different sources. We must remember that apart from the planets themselves, there are numerous small bodies traveling between Jupiter and Mars. From any one of these may have fallen the cosmical dust which has germinated here. Some of this star life has appeared and has died. Some of it survives and is developing hourly."

He stirred restlessly.

"I am tempted," he said, "to enter the laboratory again. I am queerly interested in the culture yet remaining. Mark my words, Ruth, it will prove the most extraordinary of all."

"I would destroy it utterly, this very minute, if I dared," the girl said passionately. "It is dreadful to think that here in the house with us are abominable intelligences against which we have no defense."

"We have the defense of our—as we believe—higher intelligence," Dr. Montague said earnestly. His voice shook a little. "You yourself pointed the way, my dear. Our minds must deny these other minds, must deny and destroy them. Come now—we shall see."

King moved to Ruth's side.

"Of course we will. And I share the doctor's belief about the surviving culture. I am sure that, in some way, it will prove remarkable. I was almost saying providential. It is such a beautiful thing to see, at its present stage, that it surely cannot give birth to evil. Indeed, it may not give birth at all. It may have failed and be dead even now."

"I confess, all the same," Dr. Montague said, with a wry smile, "that the situation is not exactly pleasant. Certainly we have so far been more frightened than hurt. And probably we shall continue that way. The Biogens will inevitably succumb to terrestrial temperatures. It may be, in some cases, a lengthy business; nevertheless, it is bound to be. In the meantime, if they choose, as it were, to walk in on us, we must—"

A LITTLE scream from Ruth cut him short. A knock had sounded on the door. It was so unexpected that even King's pulses leaped sickishly.

He called, "Who is it? Is anyone at the door?"

Dr. Montague had risen. He sat down again quickly, with an audible sigh of relief, however, on the appearance of Mrs. Puckett. The housekeeper's face was pale, and her look was slightly bewildered.

She said, "I beg pardon, Miss Ruth, but I thought—I mean I wondered—"

"Yes?" said King encouragingly.

Mrs. Puckett said, in a frightened voice, "I thought I saw someone going up the stairs with a lighted candle. Fry and Joe are in their beds this long time, and I couldn't make out why anyone would be going up there at this time of night. And so I thought I'd come and see—"

"Well, we're all here," Dr. Montague said. But his laugh was strained. "You must have been mistaken, Mrs. Puckett."

"No, sir. I saw it as plain as plain can be. And I thought it was queer. Because there was just the candle like—just the candle—"

"What do you mean?" King asked sharply. "A man, was it? A man with a candle?"

Ruth's courage had returned to her. She went to the housekeeper and slipped a hand over the trembling arm.

"Something has frightened you, Mrs. Puckett. What a shame. Sit down here by the fire. Now—tell us quietly. And so you saw a man holding a candle go up the stairs?"

"Not a man," Mrs. Puckett said. She

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stared at Ruth stupidly. Her teeth chattered a little, as though she had caught a chill. "I saw—just the candle itself. Of course someone would have to be carrying it. They would, wouldn't they? But I didn't see no one. Just the candle flame mounting the stairs."

Dr. Montague said, "Ah! How do you know it was a candle flame?"

"I don't know," Mrs. Puckett said.

Ruth exclaimed quickly, "Rod, where are you going?"

"Can't have people walking about your house at midnight this way," King said, with an attempt at jocularity. "I'll just run up and have a look at things."

"Very well," Ruth said, after a little silence. "We'll both go, Rod."

King began to protest.

"Absurd. You'd freeze, away from the fire." He drew her a little apart and whispered, "This, at least, is something of flesh and blood. Candles don't walk about when no one is holding them. I'll be back in a minute or two."

"I shall go, too," Ruth said obstinately.

"And I," Dr. Montague spoke over her shoulder. "Will you sit here and keep the fire warm for us, Mrs. Puckett?"

But the housekeeper refused pointblank. She said, "Not while there's burglars about. I'll come with you. Four's better'n one."

"All right," King said. He could not conceal from himself a great relief at the thought of company. The intruder was human enough, he had little doubt, yet the facts were strange enough to warrant a certain nervousness. "We'll need a light, Ruth."

"Better without," Dr. Montague said quietly. But his eyes were curiously excited, as though at some sudden, surprising thought. "We can pick him out more easily from the darkness."

King shrugged. "As you like. Take my arm, Ruth. Now, Mrs. Puckett. Forward the Light Brigade. I take it you mean the central stairs leading to the upper story?"

"Yes, Mr. King. I was coming out of the breakfast room after setting the cloth for tomorrow morning, and I just seen it for a second, as you might say. It's mortal black in the 'all here."

"Come close to us," Ruth said.

THE darkness was Cimmerian. King could distinguish nothing of his companions. They moved, as it were, through a funnel of sightlessness.

Dr. Montague's voice came from somewhere ahead. "We're at the foot of the stairs. When did you put out the hall lamp, Mrs. Puckett?"

The fact of its extinction appeared to strike the housekeeper for the first time. She stammered, "I didn't put it out, Doctor. It was lighted a few moments ago, when I come through to Miss Ruth's room. I never thought about that until just now."

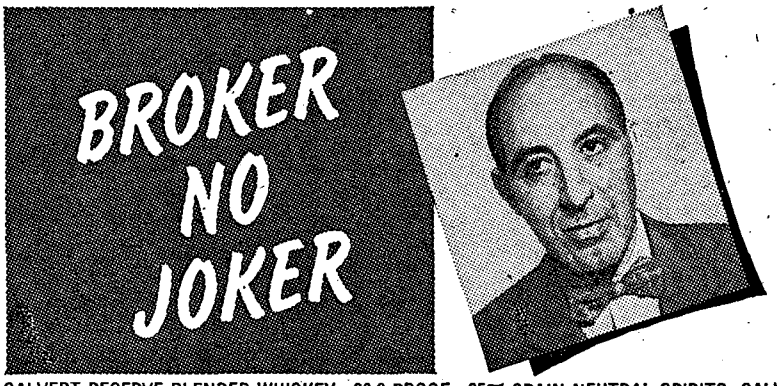
"The draught did it," King was quick to say. He pressed Ruth's arm encouragingly. "Listen to the wind outside. Very likely the oil was low, and a gust hit the flue. It doesn't matter. Are we going up, Doctor?"

"Wait!" Dr. Montague said.

Something, King could have sworn, stirred in the thick darkness over the stairhead. He heard Ruth's breath catch.

Mrs. Puckett said, with a note of hysteria, "There! Did you see it? On the landing! There it goes now!"

A pale flame, like a candle light, was suddenly visible. It moved slowly, and with a peculiar appearance of rigidity, across the face of the darkness. It was, King told himself, exactly as if someone was passing along the corridor, candle in hand,



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except that nothing of the person himself was visible.

"There are two of them!" Dr. Montague exclaimed.

"Three!" Ruth said. "Father—who are they? What are they?"

Two more candle-flames had made their appearance. They followed in the wake of the first, to vanish beyond the angle of the corridor wall. The darkness settled back into place like a curtain released.

Mrs. Puckett chattered, "Mark my words, no good can come of this. Corpse-candles—that's what they were."

"Nonsense!" Dr. Montague said sharply. He laughed. "You're too old for that kind of rubbish, Mrs. Puckett. Ruth, where are you?"

"Here," Ruth said.

Her father said, "No use to follow an *ignis fatuus*. Come back to the sitting room. King, you're sensible enough to recognize what it is that we've seen?"

"Of course," King said. On the hint given, he was prepared to perjure himself completely. The scientist's wit, he realized, was seeking a way to reassure the women. "As kids we used to call them will-o'-the-wisps. They do scare you for a moment, though, until you realize what they are.

"In the house!" Ruth said.

"Why not?" Dr. Montague asked, leading the way back into the cheerful warmth and light. "You know the properties of marsh-gas, Ruth. It's quite possible—indeed, you've just seen it for yourself—for the gas to release a floating bubble or two into a window or ventilator. We've explained your ghost for you, now, Mrs. Puckett."

The housekeeper was completely deceived. "How foolish I've been and gone. I never thought of them being marsh lights. And all that swamp down there at the foot of the 'ill. I'll be off. And thank you, gentlemen, kindly. You're going to bed now, Miss Ruth?"

"Yes," Ruth said. King could not read her expression. He thought, however, that her reason was satisfied. "Good night. I'm so dreadfully tired."

"Sleep well," King said cheerily. He smiled at her as she nodded from the doorway. "This ought to be a lesson to us. Most human fear is unjustified."

But when she had gone he asked bluntly, "What was it really, Doctor?"

"I don't know," Dr. Montague said. "Flame, as you saw. I suspect it was still another form of cosmical life."

"But a flame," King objected, "isn't alive, except in the popular sense."

"Is it not?" the scientist said. He smiled and shook his head. "Science does not agree with you, my boy. Even in ancient times it was believed that, in an elementary sense, flames were alive. All luminous bodies, in fact. Hippocrates, for example, declared that flames were living things. And the idea that the sun is the source of life, as well as of light, animated the cult of fire worship.

"At least we know this. Flames partake in the process of metabolism. Metabolism alone, certainly, is not the whole of what we call vital action. Something else is required. Luminous bodies thus fall short of an actual science such as bio-physics. But in so far as flames subscribe to the process of metabolism, we are entitled to regard them as elementary life. It has long since been shown that separate large luminous molecules have their existence in flames."

KING, marveling, asked, "These—can I call them, say, flame germs?—these flame germs, then, are phosphorescent. Is that what you mean?"

"All radioactive substances produce phosphorescence," Dr. Montague said. "In the case of phosphorus, for example, luminosity comes from a slow process of combustion. These flame creatures—they are undoubtedly a kind of creature—are radioactive. Their luminosity may be entire—that is to say, it may embrace their whole extent—or it may be only a nucleus about which centers an unsuspected, because unseen, shape.

"I am not prepared to say which it is. I believe such creatures are harmless to us. It is unlikely that they contain any form of intelligence. Their activities are not concerned wth mind-stuff, but are the blundering results of their metabolic processes.

"In some respects we were not far short of the truth when we spoke of them as marsh gas. There are separate luminous molecules in gases. Energy stored in a phosphorescent body may subsequently be radiated in the form of light. The subject is highly technical."

"Too technical for me." He debated silently for a moment, then said, "Can you tell me this, Doctor? Would it be possible for an invisible body to make a visible track?"

"What do you mean by an invisible body?"

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King told him of the tracks of satyrlike hoofs which young Joe Murgle had discovered.

"God knows," Dr. Montague said, with a little despairing gesture of his thin hands, "how many of these extravagant creations my rashness has let loose on earth. They multiply hourly. There seems to be no end to their number and variety. You are sure of what you say?"

"Quite sure, unfortunately."

Dr. Montague said somberly, "This is the worst phase yet. You were wise to withhold this discovery from Ruth. If I could, I would send her away. But she would not leave me, King. And I cannot desert an obvious duty. I evolved these star germs, and their destruction is my responsibility. But I would to God I had never tampered with so dangerous an experiment."

"You were not to know that the nature of such life was wholly malign."

"It was irreligious. Some things are beyond the province of man's duty. His curiosity is an impertinence to Him who created him. I begin to realize that now —when it is too late. I pray that if punishment is called for, it may be meted out to me alone."

King broke an uncomfortable silence by saying, "Such life might just as easily have been good. You were not to know about that."

"To return to your question," Dr. Montague said, with a sigh, "a strict reply is not readily come at. You ask if it is possible for an invisible body to leave a visible track, as in the case of the satyr hoof. And I ask you what you mean by an invisible body."

"Something we cannot see," King replied, at a loss to understand what the scientist was driving at.

"Wind is not itself visible," said Dr. Montague. "We see the effect of wind, but we cannot see the wind itself. We see the ripples in the sand, and on the face of the water, for example. In this case, however, the visible effect is not general but entirely local. It is cast in a single mold, and is the work of an entity and not of an element."

King said eagerly, "Exactly. It is a phantom footprint. How can that be? How is it possible that something immaterial can make a material print, in as ordered and regular sequence as that represented by a human foot?"

"It depends upon what we mean by invisible," Dr. Montague said. He looked at the clock, and rose to his feet, yawning wearily. "If, for example, you were blind, am I the less material because to you I am invisible? In other words, is the invisibility of this satyrlike Biogen a property of itself or of the limitation of your power of sight?

"Until we can answer that we cannot answer your question. You see what I mean?"

In his bedroom, King stood a moment at the open window before turning in. The rain had ceased and a watery section of moon drove through the clouded arc of night sky. The wind howled.

He fell into a heavy sleep almost as soon as his head touched the pillow.

CHAPTER V

OF SHAPES UNNAMEABLE

As Ruth discovered on consulting the luminous dial of the clock on the table at her bedside, it was within a few minutes of three o'clock in the morning, when she awakened on the crest of a nightmare. Her heart was pounding.

The experience was not new, for she was subject to mild night terrors of the kind. Since early childhood, her sleep had been disfigured by bad dreams; and, while she was to some extent resigned to this, she could never wholly escape those first few moments of waking terror, when her mind struggled to sort the real from the unreal.

As always in such case her wakening now was complete. She knew that, normally, she must lie for an hour or more, before sleep again returned. Yet not quite always, for she had once dreamed that she had awakened out of an horrific inner dreaming, and had then awakened actually. This double awakening was unpleasant in itself, and had become indelibly impressed on her consciousness.

Afterward, she could never be sure, for some moments after wakening, that further wakening might not come. But sleep, once banished, withdrew sulking into a corner, and might not be coaxed back.

The foot of the bed pointed at the window. Lying with wide-open eyes, Ruth could faintly distinguish beyond it an oblong of cold, moonlit sky. The clouds had dispersed and the room was filled with a phosphorescent haze. She knew a queer depression as the seconds passed. Not yet completely recovered from the effects of her dreaming, it seemed to her that there were voices in the wind and hands in the obscurity.

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She closed her eyes, but immediately opened them again, with a sense of disquiet. In some undefined way, the room was not wholly normal. Something had gone from it, or had come into it.

Turning on her side, Ruth began to check off the various familiar articles of furniture. There was the dressing-table in the alcove by the window; in heavier shadow, the wardrobe and bookcase. There, to the right of the fireplace, the big leather chair. By the door, the cane settee. The wicker table was in its place at the side of the bed. The rugs where they always had been.

It was at this point that her mind faltered. She had looked for two rugs, and she found three. The third, of which she had no recollection whatever, was set in a white square almost at the center of the floor, between her bed and the door. By the bedside—as her lowered hand now told her—was the gray floor-rug she had bought on her last trip to the city. That, and the Persian mat on the linoleum by the window, were the only rugs the room contained. Yet indubitably she saw a third rug—a thing of gleaming white, where only the dark of linoleum ought to have been.

Staring, Ruth felt that she had not really wakened at all. And she lay waiting for the real awakening to come, and wondering in a sick way at the extraordinarily undreamlike nature of her remaining impressions.

She could hear the ticking of the clock by the bedside, could see the half raised window-shade moving to the wind, could feel the fingers of her clasped hands biting into her flesh. Surely, she thought, no dreaming could know such vitality. She began to study the appearance of the strange rug.

Now that she looked more closely at it, she saw that it resembled a huge square of flat, white cardboard or thick paper. She had thought at first that its whiteness was borrowed from the moonlight. Now she saw that this was inherent. It gave out a phosphorescent glow. It was like luminous fungus. . . .

The conviction came to Ruth that what she saw was not the substance of a dream, but a reality. She sat up in bed, her pulses rioting. And now she saw something else. Just inside the door were two thin, vertical lines of amber brightness, of about the thickness of her little finger. The lines were, as it might be, cords joining the floor to the ceiling, except that each end appeared to fall short of its objective.

The impression given was of suspension vertically in mid-air, without—as the police courts would have said—any visible means of support. They were perfectly straight and still, and reminded her of cracks in a wall, with a light shining beyond.

Ruth's own stillness was not wholly by design. A mounting terror numbed her limbs. There was something disgusting and horrible in those amber lines, and in the whitely gleaming square on the floor.

Her eyes made timid excursion from one to the other, while her heart beat wildly. She was, she knew now, face to face with still another species of bizarrely fashioned cosmical life; creative conceptions that might well be the work of a lunatic or a devil; entities so outrageously shaped as to sicken human thought.

Her father's explanation of the candle flames had not deceived her in the least. She had known at once that they were some form of metabolic energy.

Red Gates was literally swarming with obscene life, both seen and unseen. A miracle had been wrought, but it was a miracle of scientific blundering. Like the Frankenstein monster, it bade fair to exact a terrible penalty before returning to the pit from which it came.

Yet with full realization came a return of her courage. Her thought began to flow clearly and sharply. She considered what she ought to do. The star germs apparently were not concerned with her presence, or were ignorant of it. It was possible, indeed, that they were mere shapes quite lacking in biogen or mind-stuff, and therefore easily outwitted.

THE wonder that filled her to witness individuals belonging to the multifarious cosmical life, which she herself had helped to bring to earth, further restored her control. She told herself that she must obtain what data she could, while the rare opportunity held.

She began very cautiously to leave her bed. How life might be contained in such monstrosities, she could not imagine.

The germ on the floor was apparently as insubstantial as a sheet of paper. It had no bulk. Vital organs, as earthly bodies knew them, must be completely absent. And the same applied to the stringlike, vertical creatures. They were mere lines of penciled brightness.

Yet they were all complete enough as

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regarded sensory fibers, for no sooner had her feet touched the floor than an agitation swept them. The lines shortened and then vanished. The square creature became oblong, moving with a gliding motion toward the closed door, beneath which it disappeared. All this was accomplished without the slightest sound, and so rapidly that Ruth could hardly follow it.

She slipped into her dressing-gown and slippers. She opened the door carefully, and peered into the dark corridor. At first, her straining sight saw only the blank wall of the night. But presently she was aware of a phosphorescence on the floor before King's room. She watched it waxing and waning, as though to some respiratory process; then saw it suddenly extinguished altogether. It had, she knew, slid under King's door.

It occurred to her that the creature possessed an intelligence less rudimentary than she had at first supposed. And, with the thought, came a return of her fear. She pictured its movements in King's room. For all she knew, it was as wholly malign as others of the star germs which they had encountered. Indeed, she was swept by a terrifying conviction that King was even then in some sort of danger.

On an impulse—for which she could never feel sufficiently grateful—Ruth opened his door.

The room was in dim twilight. She could distinguish the gray patch of the window, and the blurred outline of the bed. King's calm breathing came to her ears. By narrowing her eyes Ruth could separate the ridge that was his body from the surrounding shadow. Almost instantly her pulses quickened.

The bed, she saw, had a gray coverlet. It appeared first at the foot-rail. Her eye traced it slowly onward. Or was it that the coverlet itself appeared to move? It was spreading across the gap between the foot-rail and the head of the bed, as though King were drawing the bedclothes more comfortably under his chin.

With realization, Ruth screamed. Simultaneously, the gray thing contracted and fell to the floor. There came from it, as it moved, a tiny darting ray, like a weak electrical discharge. It was gone in an instant.

King had wakened and was sitting up. His voice asked sharply, "What was that? Who is that?"

Ruth said, "Rod! Rod, are you all right? Oh, Rod—that beastly coverlet!"

"Ruth!" He scrambled out of bed and lit the candle. "Ruth, was it you that screamed? Steady, dear. It's quite all right. Just wait a moment."

She leaned against the wall, gasping weakly in the hysteria of her relief, while he pulled an overcoat over his pajamas. He came over to her, then, and slid a comforting arm about her shoulders.

She said, "It was one of those hideous Biogens. I think it would have smothered you, if I hadn't called out. They were in my room—three or four of them—and I saw one go in under your door. I followed it in. It was crawling up your body!"

"The devil it was!"

In spite of himself, he could not repress a shudder.

He said, "Ruth, it looks as though you'd come just in time to save my life. Things are getting too warm for my liking."

"Rod, supposing I'd come too late?"

He patted her shoulder. At the look in her eyes, his mind knew a swift elation. He recalled how she had said that his danger might bring her to the love he so urgently desired of her. But he was careful to reveal nothing of this.

"Well, but you see you didn't. Look here, I'd like to follow these germs and—fight back. In a sense, they must be vulnerable to attack. There must be some way in which we can kill or wound them. It's worth trying, anyhow."

"What can we do?"

Her self-control had returned. The idea of retaliation made her eyes shine. "I'd give anything to wipe the beastly things out of existence. . . . Rod, it was like a sheet of paper. A horrible dead-white surface. And there were other things like thin strings of putty. Nightmare things."

"Even nightmares pass in time."

He slipped Dr. Montague's automatic into his overcoat pocket.

"Come along and let's see what we can find. If Biogens are bullet-proof we'll give them a chance to show it. Will you carry the candle?"

IN THE corridor a deathlike silence reigned. They talked in whispers, as they went along it.

"I suppose," Ruth said, "it wouldn't have gone into Father's room."

"I'll slip in and see."

King did. He rejoined her in a minute.

"Everything is right. Not a sign. Your dad's snoring would scare any star germ that ever lived. Let's try the breakfast room and your sitting room."

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They did so, but to no result. The queer creatures Ruth had seen were no longer to be found. The house was quiet and normal.

"Nothing doing," King said.

But a second later he took the candle from Ruth and moved it from side to side. His face was wrinkled distastefully.

"What a nasty smell," Ruth said.

They were at the foot of the main stairs, and King stood eyeing the darkness above.

"Foul, isn't it? Can't make out what it is. You haven't been leaving any chemicals about? Phew! It's like that stuff—what's the name of it? I remember as a boy in chemistry class I used to take the stopper out of the jar, when the chemistry master had his back turned. Sulphuretted hydrogen—that was it. It reminds me of that. That's queer."

"What?" Ruth said.

But she knew what he meant, even as she said it. The stench had gone as suddenly as it had come.

"Rod!"

The shocked quality in her voice, together with the sudden tightening of her fingers about his arm, brought King sharply out of his abstraction. He noted, as he thrust the candle back into her hand, that the mephitic stench had returned. It beat upon his senses like a wave.

Ruth was standing perfectly rigid. The pupils of her upturned eyes were contracted almost to pinpoints, and her whole expression was one of profound, immeasurable horror. He heard the breath bubbling in her throat.

Following her gaze to the stairhead, he said, "Good God!"

On the landing where, a few hours previously, they had seen the flame-germs marching across the darkness, a bearded, goatlike face cleft the inky shadows, in a devil's cameo of hooded light. The satyr features leered over the half-seen bannister at the fear-drugged girl standing below—and King, as he felt frantically for his automatic, had a stirring in his ears as of a bleating voice convulsed with infamous mirth.

He fired twice—thrice, as fast as he could touch the trigger; and saw the hideousness recede to a mere smudge, and go out like a blindness. He caught Ruth's fainting body, as the candle fell from her hand, and was extinguished. In the swirling darkness he had a horrible thought that the satyr-thing was coming down the stairway to wrest the girl from his desperate arms.

Dr. Montague's shouting steadied him. Lights had sprung in the corridor, and he heard Mrs. Puckett's door open. He called; "It's all right, I think. Ruth has fainted."

The scientist, hair touseled and eyes blinking, came hurrying forward.

"What was it? You fired at something. . . ."

"Nerves," King said, for the benefit of Mrs. Puckett. "Ruth thought she heard something, and we came out to look. I fired at a venture. Mrs. Puckett—see if you can find the brandy."

Ruth, to his immense relief, opened her eyes, before the housekeeper could comply. She said faintly, "No, I'm all right. I'm just—a bit frightened. I'll go back to bed."

King said, "Not alone. I insist. Mrs. Puckett will share your room for the rest of the night."

"Of course," Mrs. Puckett said. She put a motherly arm around the shaking girl. "We'll talk about it in the morning, dearie—whatever it was. Nice goings on. 'Aunted, that's what we are. Tubes and things."

King said, when the women had gone, "It was a satyr. You'll think I am mad. I can't help it. It was a satyr."

"The tracks young Murgle found!" Dr. Montague exclaimed. He looked at King, and passed a thin hand over his chin. "No, I don't think you're mad. Unless we're all mad together. How can we say what forms interstellar life takes? Who knows but what the ancients made similar mad experiments, and immortalized their horror in the satyrs, hippogriffs, gargoyles, and so on, that we meet in mythology? Come into Ruth's sitting room. There can be no more sleep for us tonight. No, my boy, I don't think you are mad. I believe that you saw exactly what you say you saw. Was the creature entirely to be seen?"

"Head and shoulders only. They were plain beyond possibility of mistake. The ears, the high cheek-bones, the horns."

"You remember the stench in the laboratory, King. It was there, then, but we did not see it. We felt it, and we smelled it. Now two hypotheses are before us. Either this Satyr-biogen can materialize and dematerialize at will, or—and this is the more probable—it is developing by degrees. But it is this Satyr-biogen that gives me most concern. There is something devilish about it. We must send Ruth away from here. You must help me to convince her."

"She won't go."

"Still, we'll try to persuade her and Mrs. Puckett. Red Gates is no longer safe."

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They were still seeking an argument to present to Ruth when the dawn broke.

MR. MURGLE, alighting from the tram on the confines of "The Working Man's Residential Paradise," tugged irritably at his rust-colored mustache, as he tramped homeward through the thickening dusk.

Truth to tell, Mr. Murgle was far from happy. The be-boiled foreman—to use the unionistic vernacular—had his knife well into him, and Mr. Murgle's small frame was wrung dry with gloomy foreboding. Throughout the day each hod of bricks carried the additional weight of the foreman's malice, and the knock-off calls had been but invitations to a lecture on the shortcomings of bricklayers' laborers in general, and Mr. Murgle in particular.

It was no wonder that the close of the day saw Mr. Murgle in the frame of mind popularly known as "rat-house."

As he arrived at the crest of the hill, the light from his kitchen window winked like a great welcoming eye. His ears were assailed with a familiar uproar, through which the reprimanding tones of his eldest daughter darted here and there, with knifelike rapidity.

"Kids!" Mr. Murgle frowned. "Noise. Mouths to feed. What the 'ell now?"

He stormed inside, his hands over his ears. Mrs. Murgle sat sadly in the rocking-chair, her frying-fork moving to the symphony of her children's tears, as though it were a conductor's baton. Miss Jane Murgle, inkstained and angry, held Horace by a small, grubby ear.

"Now!" Mr. Murgle shouted. "Now! Damned kids! Jane, you leave 'Orrie alone. Now then. What's the matter?"

"Joe's been bit by a ghost!" Horace blubbered.

"What!" Mr. Murgle said.

Mrs. Murgle's attempted explanation was annihilated by a tremendous deluge of sound. Little Hermie, who had been storing her breath since the entry of her male parent, now released it with extraordinary abandon.

"Outside!" Mr. Murgle ordered. "Jane, get them kids out in the yard. Noise—"

"I won't!" Jane defied. "I haven't touched my homework yet. Nice chance I've got to pass exams. They're not my kids!"

"Jane!" Mrs. Murgle said feebly. "'Ow dare you be so disrespectful to your father?"

Mr. Murgle appeared to choke. "You do as I say. I won't 'ave no argument. Take 'em out, I say."

"I'm sure," Mrs. Murgle complained, as the door banged, "it ain't my fault. You know how 'Orrie is. Jane will tease 'im about ghosts. And little Hermie don't like 'im crying."

"Ghosts!" Mr. Murgle said. He turned a dripping face from the kitchen sink. "What ghosts! What are you talking about?"

"Joe's wrote again," Mrs. Murgle said. "He says a ghost bit him, Father. Jane started reading out—"

Mr. Murgle said heavily, "'Ow could a ghost have bit 'im? If you ask me, that boy's getting dottier and dottier. Give it 'ere."

"You'd best have your tea first, Father."

"I said give it 'ere," Mr. Murgle insisted. He took the letter and spread it on the table at his elbow. "Ain't them sorsages done yet? Well, 'urry them. Now what's this?"

He began to read aloud.

"Dear Mum:

I hope you are quite well. I wish I could say the same but O mum you ought to see my foot its all swelled. Mrs. Puckett said Joe you had a narrow escape from deth and I said I know that.

You see mum I trod on a ghost and it bit me. You see it was like this mum. The doctor has been making things grow in his labortry and the other day they got out into the house and now we can't find them. And Mr. King said to me Joe we can count on you to the last ditch my boy. I would sooner have you Joe than anyone I know. And I said I am not afrade tell me your trouble. And he said Joe something queer has happened and we must be careful. And I said what and he said I don't know.

Nobody knows but it is something funny and people wouldn't believe it if we told them. So you must not tell anybody at all. And so I won't only you mum."

Mr. Murgle paused to say, "Where's them sorsages?"

"In a minute, Father."

Mr. Murgle swallowed and continued:

"Well mum last night I was asleep and I woke up and I was very thirsty. So I thought I would get a drink of water. Mr. Fry was snoring fearfully I thought he would burst. Well mum I got out of bed but there is no outside tap so I had to go into the kitchen for a drink.

The door was not locked so I went in and it was very dark. But I was not afrade. And I would not have cared only it was cold because I had only my bare feet being in a hurry. Well mum there

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was a white thing on the floor but I did not see it until I trod on it and it bit me on the foot and it is all swelled up. My word I did yell and Mr. King came running in a revolver in his hand. Where is he Joe have you got him. And I said O my foot. And he said what is wrong with your foot. And I said it has been bitten by the ghost. And he said good God Mrs. Puckett bring a light. And Dr. Montague came and looked at it and we bathed it with hot water."

MR. MURGLE snorted and thrust the letter temporarily aside, in favor of the steaming sausages profferred by Mrs. Murgle. His small eyes held an incredulous gleam.

He said, in a voice disfigured by superhuman mastication, "Let 'er rot. Whoever 'eard of a ghost biting you?"

He turned once more to the letter. It was a long letter, as became a correspondent who was granted by affliction a temporary surcease of work.

Well mum my foot is poisoned but not badly. Dr. Montague said it reminds me of the effect of a stone fish only not nearly so bad. It will be all right again in a week or so.

You have no idea how funny this place is now. Mrs. Puckett who is Emily's aunt says we are all haunted. Only the other night Mrs. Puckett's cat went mad and ran all over the place. And Mrs. Puckett said now Joe no nonsense you must have been teasing Daniel. But I said no I am innosent. It howled like anything but got all right again.

Mr. King says that animals know if there are ghosts about. They have a sick sense that tells them. He thinks that Daniel saw the ghost but Fry only snears. Fry says the only ghost he knows is the one that walks once a week. He says it is so thin that you can't see it anyhow. Mrs. Puckett says she thinks Fry means his wages but he is always grumbling about something Joe. Don't you take any notice of him. And I said let him snear.

"Who's this Fry?" Mr. Murgle demanded stertorously of the ceiling. His eye was dull with eating. "Who's this Fry that we 'ear so much about?"

Mrs. Murgle said, "Why, Father, what's 'appened to your memory? Joe's always telling about him. He's the gardener."

"I know that," Mr. Murgle retorted. He lit his pipe. "What I mean is, who's this Fry to give 'is back-chat to a son of mine? That's what I mean."

He glared around.

"You've had a glass or two," Mrs. Murgle accused. "That's 'ow you always talk when you've 'ad a glass or two. You get to wanting to fight everybody."

"Never mind," Mr. Murgle said loudly.

He picked up the letter.

Well mum I must now close as it is getting late. Its funny how the ghosts come that we all sleep together now. I mean Miss Ruth has brought Mrs. Puckett into her room and the doctor and Mr. King are both in the doctors room. Mrs. Puckett says it is for pertection. But I don't see what pertection there is for anyone sleeping in Fry's room.

Because Fry does nothing but snore and a ghost could come in and he would still snore. Give my love to dad and Jane and Horrie and little Hermie. And I remain your loving son

Joe.

As Mr. Murgle slowly returned the letter to its envelope, Jane put her head round the door.

She said tartly: "What about my tea? I suppose I don't matter, so long as other people are fed. I'm hungry."

She tossed her head.

"Young impertinence," Mr. Murgle said.

"Bring the children in," said Mrs. Murgle. "Now 'Orrie. . . ."

JOE MURGLE'S misadventure in the kitchen happened on the night following the appearance of the Satyr-biogen on the stairhead. It was obvious that the two encounters had no connection. The creature that had poisoned the youth's foot was of the order of—if not, indeed, the selfsame as—that seen by Ruth on the floor of her bedroom. For purposes of definition they referred thereafter to Joe's assailant as the Geometrical-biogen. This term was understood to include also the queer bright lines which Ruth had seen. Later, however, Dr. Montague was able to determine a more exact nomenclature.

The puzzling feature of the affair, as they now considered it, was that the skin of the poisoned foot was without visible puncture. There was nothing to show how the poison had been injected. Yet poison—and a virulent poison at that—it certainly was. The agony endured by young Murgle during the space of perhaps an hour, had been frightful to see.

Fortunately Dr. Montague had been able to give a light injection of morphia. This deadened the pain considerably. The scientist explained later that without knowledge of the nature of the poison, he had not cared to risk the larger injection otherwise permissible. No ill effects followed

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the dose given, however. Within two hours the pain completely ceased. For some days the foot continued swollen and stiff. At the end of a week, it was normal and healthy.

In the meantime, a third happening finally determined Dr. Montague and King that Ruth and Mrs. Puckett must leave Red Gates for their own protection. This, so far, Ruth had flatly refused to do. Horrified as she was by the apotheosis of the Satyr, she never for a second wavered in her loyalty to her father. She declared that while he remained so would she. Not all their persuasions had been able to shake her.

King, indeed, had come near to quarreling with her in the matter. The affair of Mrs. Puckett's cat overruled King's last scruples. He told himself that Ruth should leave Red Gates even if he had forcibly to remove her. He felt that her anger was more tolerable than his continual anxiety about her.

On the afternoon of the day following his encounter with the Satyr, King spent some time endeavoring to trace the results of the three shots he had fired. He found two of the bullets embedded in the plaster of the landing wall. The third, however, had apparently taken wings. He could not discover the faintest trace of it. A splintered groove in the bannister suggested that it had ricocheted, and was perhaps lodged in the beams of the ceiling. The hypothesis that any of the shots had done more than intimidate so immaterial a target, was too absurd to be entertained.

The concussions, he thought, possibly so affected the creature's components as to dematerialize it automatically. It's metabolisms and vibrations had been interrupted and disorganized. This result, his common sense insisted, could only prove a temporary triumph. As the Satyr-biogen developed and adjusted, it must inevitably acquire resistance to so crude a reaction.

King wondered dismally how they might withstand the menace of complete development.

Joe Murgle's mishap took his attention from this consideration for some days. In this interval, nothing out of the normal was encountered. The nights passed quietly and without sight or sound of the alien influences which they so dreaded. Ruth, indeed, almost persuaded herself that the danger was past.

The star germs, she declared hopefully, had yielded at last to inimical terrestrial temperatures, and were thoroughly and satisfyingly dead. Dr. Montague was so far impressed that he debated the advisability of entering the laboratory. He was, indeed, on tenterhooks to learn the fate of the sixth and only remaining culture. Only King's earnest pleas restrained this incaution.

"It would be madness, after our experience," he said. "Keep out of the laboratory until we know for certain that no star life persists in the house itself. Don't you agree with me, Ruth?"

She said reluctantly, "I suppose it's the wisest thing to do. But, really, Rod, I think we're out of the wood. Nothing has been seen or heard for nearly a week. How foolish I would look now, if I'd run away as you wanted me to."

KING heard her singing blithely as he climbed the stairs to resume his search for the missing bullet. From the landing window, he saw her presently enjoying the brief sunshine of the garden. Nearby Fry was leisurely at work on a bed of azaleas. Dr. Montague, a little sore at being longer deprived of his beloved research, had gone for the mail to the township post office. Joe Murgle was convalescing on the veranda, and a clatter of pots and pans from the kitchen gave evidence of the activities of Mrs. Puckett.

He was inspecting the ceiling, with the aid of a torch, when the housekeeper called a little agitatedly from the hall.

"Are you there, Mr. King?"

"What is it?" King was impatient at the interruption. "Anything wrong?"

Mrs. Puckett said, "It's Daniel. He's down in the cellar, and making such queer sounds. I've called and called, but he won't come out. And he hasn't had his breakfast."

"Damn Daniel!" King said, under his breath.

But the housekeeper's anxiety was so pronounced that he hadn't the heart to say it aloud. After all, Daniel was Ruth's cat, in point of strict ownership. He was a lean, black, disreputable-looking animal, with the tip of one ear missing, and a decided leer in his green, slitted eyes. Ruth, in spite of his Bacchanalian appearance, was fond of him. She and Mrs. Puckett both declared that Daniel really possessed the soul of a saint.

King said, "All right. I'll see what I can do. How did he get into the cellar? I thought the place was never used."

"Neither it is," Mrs. Puckett said, as King joined her. She burst out, "It's that

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Fry, I expect. The door's always kept shut, but now it's open. Fry's that careless. . . . There, Mr. King, just listen to him. Daniel! Daniel! Come out, I say, and get your breakfast."

The cellar door was in reality a small hinged trap set in the floor of the scullery. A wooden ladder descended to the earthen foundations some twelve or fifteen feet below.

King had no knowledge of the interior, but imagined it to be the usual type of old-fashioned, country-house cellar. The nooks and corners were probably forests of spider web, and its long disuse argued a regular citadel of rats. This fact, King thought, very likely accounted for Daniel's present queer behavior. The cat's rashness had landed him knee deep in the ranks of his foes, and he was—as cats in such circumstances invariably are—distraught and paralyzed with fear. Once, many years before, King had pushed a huge tomcat, renowned for the slaughter of rodents, through the narrow trap of a stable loft. The outcome had been a revelation to King.

The loft had been alive with rats, and in the darkness they had made clucking noises like an assemblage of fowls. The nerve of the feline gladiator had gone down completely before the stark menace of it, and a maddened animal, howling its fright, had clawed its way to escape before he could shut the trap again.

Something of the kind, King conceived, accounted for the uncanny noises proceeding now from the darkened cellar. By lowering the electric torch he was able to see a portion of the interior. The battery, however, was nearly exhausted, and the light was too feeble to reveal much. The brick-pile foundations, moreover, obscured his view. It was from the direction of the second of these piles that the sounds came. The floor showed a litter of straw and broken cases, with here and there the gleam of bottleglass.

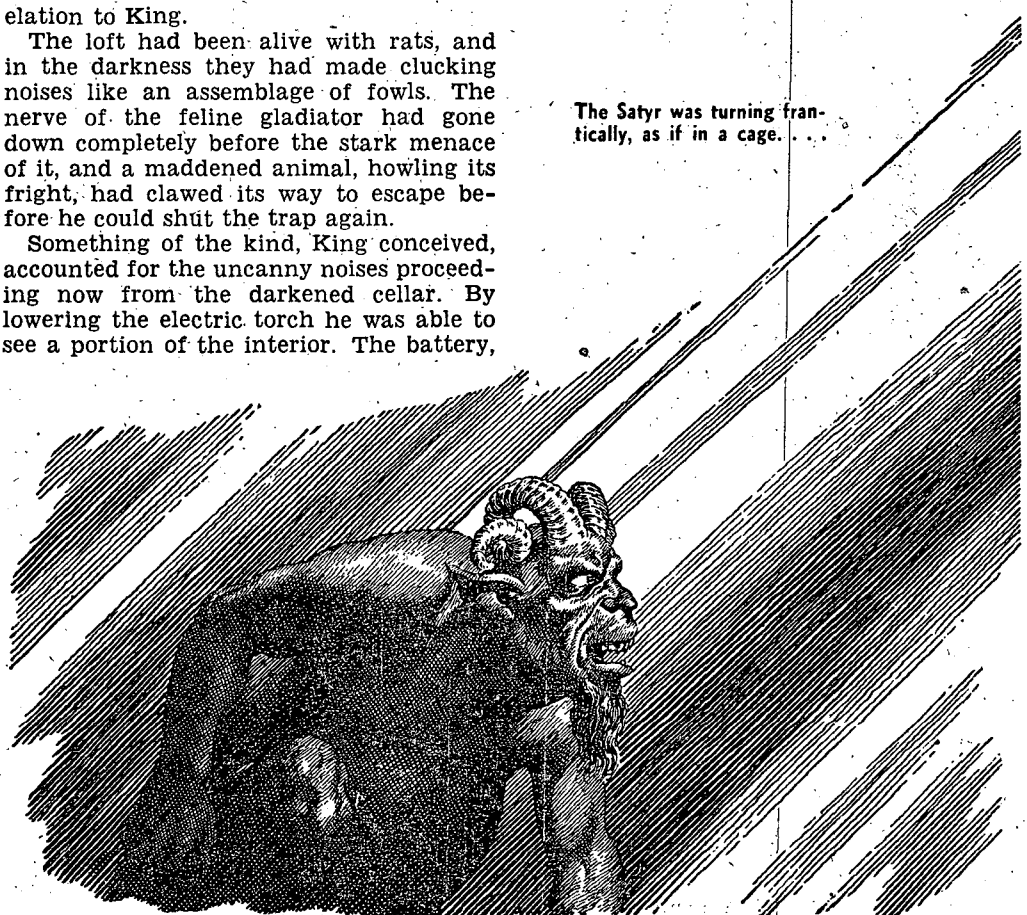
King, flat on his face over the trap, called, "Daniel! Here, puss. You might at least show yourself."

"The pore thing," Mrs. Puckett said sentimentally. She stood at his side, her hands in the pockets of her apron. "You'll be going down to get him? The pore beast."

"Daniel!" King called again.

He was not at all sure that he would venture into the cellar. It came over him quite suddenly that they were confronted with something more significant than the mere imprisonment of the animal, whose eerie complainings grew momentarily more pronounced.

The darkness below appeared to have become so thick that the failing torchlight



The Satyr was turning frantically, as if in a cage. . . .

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Little by little it resolved itself into the outline of a face. . . .

scarcely made an impression at all. King's eyes somehow refused to adjust themselves to the black, musty depths.

He might almost, he thought, be staring at something solid and opaque; except that it held—or seemed to hold—a kind of stealthy movement.

The crying of the cat chilled his blood.

Suddenly, and without warning, it ceased. There was not even an echo remaining. One moment the sound was in his ears, shrill and tormented; the next it was gone. As he listened, it appeared to King that a new sound took its place. Rather, it was an emanation from the darkness itself; an overlapping vibration that was sensed, not actually heard. He drew back from the opening in a kind of panic. As he did so a tiny draught of wind stroked his cheek.

Mrs. Puckett was staring at him with wide-open eyes. "I can't hear Daniel."

"No."

He gave his shoulders a shake. He was angry at his own cowardice. Here was a poor devil of a cat stuck in a cellar, and for a moment he had actually felt too scared to go down and rescue it.

He said abruptly, "Get me a candle. Why, of course, I'm going down after him. Unless, that is—"

"Unless what?"

"Why, confound it," King said, forcing a laugh, "I could have sworn just a moment ago that he came out. I distinctly felt— You saw nothing, I suppose?"

Mrs. Puckett said stupidly, "I'm sure he didn't. How could he come out without me seeing 'im? Here's your candle."

King accepted the reproof in silence. He had a fancy that Mrs. Puckett thought he had taken leave of his senses. And certainly it was rather a foolish thing he had said. As though a full-grown cat, the size of Daniel, could have escaped observation.

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Besides, in that case, what had become of him now?

There was nothing in the least vivacious about Daniel. He was the most slothful animal King had ever seen. He would signalize his rescue by rubbing himself against Mrs. Puckett's ankles. . .

King descended rapidly, candle in hand. To his surprise the cellar proved far less dark than he had supposed. The air was musty and stale, but nothing more. He felt perfectly at his ease. There was not even a rat to be seen, nor a sign of one. The walls, he now saw, were bricked. The floor was of earth, tamped hard and level. The ceiling was of flat sheet-iron nailed on the undersides of a scullery floor—joists. The whole cellar was, in fact, most thoroughly vermin-proof.

CHAPTER VI

HOOFPRINTS OF THE SATYR

HE WALKED behind the brick foundation pillar expecting to discover Daniel crouching apologetically. The space, however, was empty. It was the same behind the second pillar. In growing wonder, he made investigation of the rubbish on the floor. He lifted aside the boards and turned over the straw. Nothing. There was no vestige of the animal. Nor was there any possible hiding place. The cellar was blank of any life but his own.

The sheer amazement of it staggered King. In God's name, he thought, what had become of Daniel? The beast had been there not five minutes before. He had heard it. Mrs. Puckett had heard it. All the evidence of his senses told him that the cat had not come itself from the cellar. He could not understand how he had got hold of such a preposterous idea. And yet—

He searched for fully ten minutes, leaving no posisble corner unscoured. The floor, the walls, the ceiling. There was no crevice anywhere. Daniel had vanished as completely as though he had been converted into thin air.

Something of his first feeling of panic assailed King as he began to mount the ladder. The mystery admitted of but one explanation, he believed. Some form of cosmical life had been in the cellar. It had—King could think of no other word—it had devoured the cat. He did not see how this was possible in so rapid and complete a fashion, yet he had little doubt of it. The Biogen had surrounded and absorbed this poor creature of earth, as air absorbs any evaporative matter. Leaving no trace. . . .

But there was trace, after all. On the topmost rung of the ladder were two or three ominous red spots. Spots of fresh blood. Sight of them turned his own blood to ice. If an end so tragic could befall Daniel, why not any other creature of flesh? It as easily might happen to himself—or Ruth.

Mrs. Puckett was still standing by the trap. Her look was incredulous.

She said, "Where's Daniel? Haven't you got him?"

"He isn't there," King said bluntly. "The cellar's empty."

"Empty!"

King thought it wise to be perfectly frank. "Something was down there with him. It— Well, I don't know what happened. Anyhow, Daniel isn't there any longer. That's all I know."

"You mean one of them ghost things has got him?" Mrs. Puckett said, in open-mouthed horror.

"I suppose so," King said. "I told you I thought I saw—felt, I should say—something come from the trap, just as I stepped back."

"I can't believe it," the housekeeper said feebly.

"Then where is the cat?" King asked grimly.

Mrs. Puckett stared, then moved away. He heard her calling from room to room.

"Daniel—Daniel—"

King, frowning, rummaged about for hammer and nails. He set the trapdoor in position and nailed it firmly in place. He was determined that the gruesome incident should not find repetition, in that quarter at least.

When he found Ruth, she had already heard the story from Mrs. Puckett. Her eyes were full of tears.

"Oh, Rod—poor Daniel. Do you think it really happened like that?"

King's anxiety for her made him sound gruff. "I'm glad of it, if it brings us to our senses. You must see that it's impossible for you to stay here any longer. Supposing it had been one of us instead of an animal!"

"We've argued that out before," Ruth said wearily. But she could not repress a shiver. "I won't leave Red Gates. If there's danger, I shall take my share of it."

"Be reasonable," King implored. "Get your things. We'll talk it over in the open.

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Anyway, a walk will do both of us good."

"All the same," Ruth said, with gentle obstinacy, as they gained the bush road, "I shan't run away."

King said doggedly, "I won't let you expose yourself to such a dreadful menace. Wait a moment. Suppose we find a compromise. Would you be willing, say, not to spend the nights at Red Gates? Supposing you and Mrs. Puckett sleep at my cottage. Young Joe Murgle can have a bed on the veranda. Ruth, meet me halfway!"

"I don't know," Ruth said. But all at once, touched by his open distress, she capitulated. "Well, then, I will, Rod. If it eases your mind. But couldn't we all do that?"

"Someone must be on the job," King said. "Your dad, Fry and I ought to be a match for any situation. I don't suppose we'll come to any harm. We'll sleep by turns—two about, while the third stands sentry."

THEY walked for an hour, before returning to Red Gates to make preparations for King's plan. The day was almost hot. The weather was experiencing one of the seasonal lapses for which the climate of England is noted. Summer was interpolated into the middle of winter. The air was sweet with budding scents.

Their congratulations on this fact were rudely dispelled by Dr. Montague. The scientist's expression was perturbed. He sat on the steps of the porch, awaiting their arrival.

"Why, Father," Ruth exclaimed, "how worried you look. Has the mail brought bad news?"

Dr. Montague shook his head.

"Not the mail, but the barometer, my dear. The one thing I dread is fine, warm weather."

They had forgotten for the moment, and could only stare at him questioningly.

"Don't you realize that only the low temperatures have so far confined the star germs to the house?" the scientist explained. "Who can say what will happen with a rising thermometer. Once in the open—"

Ruth said, "Has Mrs. Puckett told you about Daniel, Father?"

"Yes."

"What is your explanation?"

"Decidedly, the animal was destroyed by a Biogen," Dr. Montague said. His interest in the phenomenon of the cat's disappearance overcame his dejection, and his eyes sparkled behind their glasses. He rubbed his thin hands together ecstatically. "We are provided with a valuable clue here. You saw nothing of the poor beast, you say, King? And yet it undoubtedly passed you."

"Nothing," King said.

Montague nodded.

"Exactly. The deduction is plain. We are used to associating invisibility only with that which is immaterial—taking immaterial in its dictionary sense of the quality of not consisting of matter. Something invisible and intangible. Yet here we have a solid body—a body capable of containing a second solid body of flesh and blood—which is invisible. Invisible matter. Had you put out your hand as the thing passed you, you would have encountered a substance, as actual as your own flesh."

"How can you combine solidity and invisibility?" King demanded.

"We have touched on this matter before, if you remember," Dr. Montague said. "I spoke of blindness, and asked you if I would be less solid and material just because you were incapable, because you

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were blind, of seeing me. Here the clue is to be found in the limitation of human sight. All the human senses, in fact, are strictly limited. The animal senses are far more highly developed. Take hearing, for example. You see a whistle blown on a steam engine. You see the steam rush out, and you hear the noise of its escape. The sound mounts higher and higher, until at last you hear nothing. But your eyes tell you that the steam is still escaping. What has happened is that the note has risen beyond the perceptivity of your hearing. It is still sounding, but not for your ear. This Biogen then—It is solid and visible, but not for your eyes, nor any human eyes."

"Extraordinary!" King muttered.

"Two horses," Dr. Montague pursued, "put their noses together. Communication by smell, you say. But what if it is communication by sound? Suppose them merely to be uttering sounds too high or too low for human hearing to catch, and you will at once perceive the possibilities. For my own part I have always believed that the animals hold speech one with another, just as we do. Sound or hearing, color or sight—these are really interchangeable terms. The slower the vibrations, the lower the note and the darker the color. The higher the vibrations, the higher the notes, and the whiter the color. A low note, a low color. A high note, a high color. Sound and color are but different manifestations of the same thing."

He fell to musing.

Ruth presently touched his arm. "Father, we've decided that Mrs. Puckett and I, with Joe for a watchdog, are to sleep in Rod's cottage. What do you think of the idea?"

"Splendid," Dr. Montague said, rousing. "The very thing. You will be well out of harm's way. The danger is more acute in the dark hours. Evil thrives in darkness. These Biogens— Well, after all, we must not let our imaginations run away with us. Probably we greatly overestimate their potentiality for harm."

With Fry giving grumbling assistance, King spent the rest of the day, under Ruth's direction, getting the cottage in order. Late in the evening he and Joe Murgle escorted the women to their new sleeping quarters. He saw the three settled, and returned to Red Gates. He found Dr. Montague in the sitting room.

The scientist said, "I'm glad you managed to persuade Ruth. The arrangement lightens our burden. I have a feeling, King, that tragic things lie ahead."

KING confessed a like premonition. He said, "By the way, wouldn't it be as well, under the circumstances, to bring Fry into the house? I don't much like the blighter, but we're all in the same boat. And he could clear out, I suppose, if he wanted to. It's to his credit that he hasn't."

"He prefers to keep his own company," Dr. Montague said. "As a matter of fact, Fry has a grievance tonight. Every night, for nearly a year, he and Mrs. Puckett have played checkers. Ruth tells me that it's a one-sided affair, inasmuch as Fry always loses. All the same, he doesn't like being deprived of the privilege—voluntary or not—of losing to a lady. A matter of habit."

"I thought perhaps one of us ought to stand sentry each night," King said. "But if Fry is in a bad mood, we can defer that. It's very warm."

"Too warm. The fire isn't needed. My nerves are on edge."

King, infinitely relieved by the absence of Ruth, laughed reassuringly.

"It's possible, isn't it, that some, at least, of the star germs, have petered out? The things that young Murgle saw, for example. The thing like a bunch of thin string. And those queer geometrical creatures that Ruth saw."

"In some instances—yes, I should say," Dr. Montague agreed. "But in the case of the mathematically shaped creatures seen by Ruth—no. Just before you returned, King, I saw them for myself. There were four of them. They were in the lower hall. One has a perfect oblong plane. The rest were like lines—one vertical and two horizontal. They vanished at my approach."

"Can forms like that have actual life and intelligence?" King wondered.

"Both, and acutely," the scientist replied. His forehead was puckered. "Their actions proved it. It is the geometry of those creatures that most puzzles me. I try in vain to imagine what manner of star can normally be inhabited by such Euclidian shapes."

"What of the Flame-biogens?"

Dr. Montague said absently, "Probably extinguished days ago. Such immature life-forms could hardly survive for long. Indeed, the Satyr is the only development that offers definite menace. Its materialization most nearly approximates to the matter of which we ourselves are made. The geometrical creatures—"

He suddenly started to his feet, his hands clapped to his brow.

He shouted, "Of course—of course. Why

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did I not think of it before! It's as plain as a pikestaff. They are life forms from worlds of other dimensions, King. That accounts for their remarkable limitations."

"Other dimensions!"

"To be sure," Dr. Montague said impatiently. He began to stride up and down. "The more I think of it, the more certain I become. On earth, King, we know of three dimensions. We have length, breadth and thickness. We know of no other dimension. We cannot even conceive of any other dimension. And we are accordingly bounded by the three dimensions we know.

"But conceive now of a world of one dimension. An inhabitant of such a world would know, say, only a linear extension, but would know nothing of breadth or thickness. That is to say its geometry would be entirely linear.

"Or, again, take a world of two dimensions. Length and breadth, but no thickness. Such conditions would produce a creature that was a mere surface. A world of geometrical atrocities. A plane creature living in a surface. Can you imagine it?"

King shook his head.

"Not very easily."

"It is perfectly simple," said Dr. Montague. "It is the practical application of Professor Clifford's exposition of the new geometry of Lobatchowsky. We ourselves, for instance, may be quite mistaken in supposing there is not a fourth, or even a fifth and sixth, dimension. We are unable to conceive of such a thing, just as a one-dimensional creature would be unable to conceive of our three dimensions. The geometrical Biogens are undoubtedly of such order. In them we find beings from a linear world and a plane world. We have the two-dimensional creature like a sheet of paper, having length and breadth but not thickness. We have the linear creature of but one dimension, a creature merely of linear extension. A thing like a tautened string—"

The singular theory fascinated King.

He ventured, "And a creature of depth only?"

"The most absurd of all!" Dr. Montague cried. "And the most extensive. It was a Biogen of this kind, I believe, whose bulk almost suffocated young Murgle. Surface infinity is greater than linear infinity and volume infinity is greater than surface infinity. A creature knowing only the dimension of depth would have volume infinity."

"It all sounds rather beastly," King said. He added, "How could a creature with no more substance than a sheet of paper, for example, find any room for what we call brain?"

"The world of mind and the world of matter are not as distinct as some would have us believe," Dr. Montague said. "The whole substance of these plane creatures and linear creatures may be composed of Biogen or mind-stuff, for all that we know."

King was about to speak, when a dull explosion shook the air.

"The sixth tube!" Dr. Montague guessed intuitively.

They eyed each other excitedly as the echoes settled and died.

They went quickly into the corridor and gained the open of the quadrangle. It was pitch dark. But almost immediately the blackness gave place to a roseate glow. Behind the windows of the laboratory there grew a radiance so exquisite that King gasped. It had, he thought, something of the refulgence of the aurora; a softly shimmering light, magic with color suggestion; a light that was majestic and pure; a wondrous light. It gave him a feeling of immense awe.

Dr. Montague gripped his elbow fiercely, as they stood, drawing him back into the outside recess of the kitchen chimney for safety.

"My God!" the scientist breathed. "Look, King—look!"

WITH his heart in his mouth, and a tingling at the roots of his hair, King stared at the extraordinary spectacle revealed by the auroral glow. The quadrangle was filled with Biogen shapes. They moved rapidly up and down the length of the laboratory wall, in a kind of agitation, jostling each other, and pressing against the windows, as though attempting to force passage within. Linear and plane creatures, Flame-biogens, grotesque shapes with neither form nor substance, outlines so abominable to see that a sick horror filled both King and Dr. Montague. It seemed that no nightmare conception was missing from the uncanny host that swarmed against the airtight walls containing the immaculate luminance of the sixth and last culture. Some passed so near to King that the wind of their going stirred his cheek. His presence appeared to be unnoticed.

One and all of the manifestations were actuated by the same impulse, it seemed. It was as though they were gathered against a common enemy within the laboratory, and were striving desperately to

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attack it before it gained maturity. The air was vibrant with an evil anger, heavy with threat.

"My God!" Dr. Montague said again. His grip tightened upon King's arm. "Back into the house, before they discover us. Our danger was never greater—"

King was only too willing. He felt sick and frightened. He had the thought that what they saw was something out of Hell itself. His legs so shook that he could scarcely walk. The sweat sprang from every pore of his body.

When they regained the sitting room, Dr. Montague became frantically active. He said hoarsely, "Light, King. As great a light as we can make. I have a belief that sustained light is our one safeguard. Light destroys them. They shun it. The sixth culture is, in some way, strongly inimical to the rest. The things know it, and are roused to a fury of fear and hate. I pray heaven they do not find a way into the laboratory. Something tells me that our ultimate salvation will come from this wonderful Light-biogen."

They set lighted lamps and candles about the room, and stirred the dying fire to a strong flame. King presently raised the window blind and peered out into the quadrangle. The radiance in the laboratory had fallen to a silver phosphorescence. As he sought to penetrate the gloom of the quadrangle, something brushed against the outside of the window. He had a momentary vision of a flat, triangular face, set with three black, protruding, lidless eyes. A mouth that was like a red gash pouted at him. He dropped the blind with a shudder.

"God help us! What more, doctor?"

His voice was hoarse.

"We can do nothing more," Dr. Montague said. He wiped his streaming face. "King, this is fearful. I have brought Hell to earth. Did human eyes ever see the like?"

"Thank the Lord," King muttered, "the women are safe. We were only just in time. We—"

A thought chilled his heart. He stammered, "Fry!"

Dr. Montague's face became, if possible, whiter.

"I'll call him," King said.

He braced himself and strode to the door. But even as he grasped the handle he knew that it was too late. To have ventured now beyond the circle of protecting light was instant death. He could sense the creatures beyond.

Indeed, as he hesitated, Dr. Montague cried shakily, "Be careful. Stand back."

It was fortunate for King, perhaps, that he obeyed instantly. He had scarcely done so when from under the door came a thing like whipcord—white and thin and slithery. It came and went in a flash. They had a curious impression that the creature —whatever it was—had winced under the strong light.

"Fry must take his chance," Dr. Montague said. "He refused to join us."

King said, "They may not know he is there in his room."

"These are Intelligences," the scientist said. "Depend upon it, King, they know—or will know. It appals me to think what may happen to him. But it is beyond our power to aid."

King said, in a low voice, "Listen."

From the corridor, from beyond the window, from every side of the room, came a humming sound. It held a timbre ugly beyond words. It was like the chanting of evil incarnate.

Dr. Montague sat rigid and erect.

"They dare not face the light. Thank God for the inspiration. When day comes, they will be forced to retreat. Unless—"

He stopped abruptly.

"You mean," King said, "unless they go elsewhere."

"When we stood in the open," said Dr. Montague, "it seemed to me that the air was growing more chill. If that is so, it will hold them to Red Gates. No; I don't think they will go elsewhere. They will hide in darkness. Growing, King. Growing and developing the whole time."

His resolution suddenly left him. He cried desperately, "What are we to do? God forgive me for a meddling fool!"

"Courage," King said. He put a hand on the other's drooping shoulder. "There is the sixth germ—"

Dr. Montague made no reply, but it seemed to King that his body became quieter.

They sat waiting for the dawn to come.

IN THE sitting room in the cottage, Joe Murgle sat in the throes of composition. Had Joe lived in the mid-Victorian era, he would undoubtedly have been of those whose self-conceit enjoined the keeping of a diary. He would have impaled perfectly ordinary daily events, as was the custom of the age, to his own satisfaction and the complete boredom of the unfortunates who, for their sense of family and succession, believed it their duty to peruse these me-

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anderings. In Joe's case, this strange urge took the form of a regular and lengthy letter writing. It was to his advantage, also, that his subject matter never lacked for liveliness.

Whatever their drawbacks, the star germs were giving a decided fillip to existence. Joe, however, was hardly aware of the true source of the excitement which pervaded all his correspondence. He recorded events at Red Gates as accurately as a slight tendency to self-exaggeration would permit, supremely unconscious of unusual favors on the part of the gods of epistolary.

Ruth and Mrs. Puckett, thoroughly tired out by the transfer, had retired to bed, after exacting a promise from Joe that he would remain up not later than eleven o'clock. Joe, in the importance of his new rôle, had given lordly agreement. He assured them that everything would be all right while he was around. Ruth, in spite of her weariness and anxiety, found this attitude delicious. She retired smiling, and was shortly joined by Mrs. Puckett.

Left to himself, Joe began the letter which next evening was to be shown with moist-eyed pride by Mrs. Murgle, to envious neighbors. Joe's letters, in fact, were fast becoming a feature of the gossip of The Working Man's Residential Paradise. The district took pride in him as its foreign correspondent, as it were, and the remarkable happenings at Red Gates were only by a miracle withheld from the ears of the newspapers.

Dear Mum:

Well mum I got your letter safely and I am so glad to hear little Hermie has a new tooth but not that father had a fite with the foreman and is now out of work.

Well mum I am writing this at Mr. Kings cottage becos I am now sleeping there. You see Daniel that is Mrs. Pucketts cat has been ate by a ghost. At least that is what we all think. It was in the cellar. And so Mr. King said to me Joe will you care for the women at nights. Becos we count on you Joe. You are not afrade but the doctor and me are afrade for Miss Ruth and Mrs. Puckett. Becos things are going on here that I do not like and they will be safer at my cottage. And so here we are. But Mr. King and the doctor and Mr. Fry are still at Red Gates.

Dear mum if Jane was here she would have a fit. There are a lot of ghosts but they are not ghosts really. Mr. King says they are star germs. He said it is a funny thing Joe and if I were you I would not talk becos people would not believe. They would say you are mad. And so I will not tell anybody but only you mum. I heard the doctor say to Mr. King this morning did it strike you there was something even stranger in that last appearance King. And he said what do you mean doctor. And he said I mean the colors King. The Biogens are taking on a suggestion of color. This is a most interesting development. We must look into it.

Dear mum I will now close as I have no more news. Give my love to Jane and little Hermie and Horrie and father. And I remain your loving son,

Joseph Murgle.

HAVING enclosed this epistle in its envelope, and duly stamped and addressed it, Joe yawned and rubbed his eyes. The air was getting chill. He stood up and stared about him drowsily. But suddenly he became alert. His hands explored his pockets.

He said aloud, "Why, I've left my knife at the big house. If that Fry sees it, he'll pinch it from me. If it wasn't so dark, I'd go and get it now."

He pursed his lips and frowned. He thought, as he prepared for bed, "I'll slip over first thing in the morning before Miss Ruth is awake. I will so. I've seen him looking at it."

He put out the light, and made hastily for the bed on the veranda. Presently he was rolled up like a chrysalis in a cocoon, with eyes tight shut against the eerie ebb and flow of the darkness. The night, he thought, was strangely disturbing. The thick shadows that crowded the garden had seemed to move when he looked at them.

The night was somehow alive. . . .

Joe shivered a little in the sheltering blankets. But presently his apprehension relaxed, as sleep stole upon him. In a few moments he was snoring blissfully.

The first faint tinge of dawn smudged the eastern sky when he awakened. He lay a moment, peering dreamily at the unaccustomed surroundings, before recollecting his overnight's determination. The brief warmth had vanished from the air. A slight rain was falling and the wind was sharp. Summoning his resolution, he clambered out of bed and began to dress.

He told himself that he would have any amount of time to procure his pocket-knife from Red Gates, before Miss Ruth had any need of him. He supposed, however, that he would find the gardener already out of bed. Fry was an early riser. It was likely that even then he was lighting the fire in the big kitchen at Red Gates.

No smoke came from the tall chimney,

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however, as Joe trotted through the gateway and along the drive. The house rose starkly blank against the wet skies, a huge squat shadow without relief saving for a light from the window of Ruth Montague's sitting room. The boy nodded at sight of this.

Mr. King or the scientist was early astir. He wondered which it was. Or perhaps they had forgotten to put out the lamp, and it had been burning all night.

As he neared the angle of the portico, King himself supplied the answer. He came hesitatingly from the main entrance and stood on the top of the steps, looking about him. Seeing Joe, he greeted him in a surprised voice.

"Why, Joseph—you're an early bird. Everything all right at the cottage?"

"Yes," Joe said. He came presently to King's side, under cover of the portico room. "It's pretty wet. Is Fry up yet, Mr. King, please?"

King said, rather uncertainly, "I don't know, Joe. I was just coming out to find him for myself. What do you want him for?"

"I don't want *him*," Joe said. "It's my pocketknife, Mr. King. I left it in the room. I thought I'd come over and get it before—before it got lost."

He looked away.

"I suppose you mean," King said, smiling, "before Fry sees it and takes a fancy to it. Well, come on; we'll rout him out. And so you had a quiet night at the cottage, eh? Was Miss Ruth awake when you left?"

"I don't know," Joe said.

King, in the lead, said, over his shoulder, "What are you dawdling for? You'll be soaked."

"Mr. King—"

King retraced his steps to where Joe stood staring at the wet ground.

He said impatiently, "What's the matter. . . ."

His voice faded abruptly. There was a queer ache at his spine, and his eyes seemed to smart. He wondered if his face revealed his sudden agitation, and if Joe noticed it. He had to swallow a kind of lump in his throat before he could speak again.

"How did that come here?"

"It's that goat," Joe said suspiciously. "Fry'll be wild. All over the flower beds, too."

King for the moment found no answer. He could only bend his brows at the cloven hoofmarks sunk in the soft clay of the path. To his imagination, a faint stench seemed to mar the fragrance of the rain-wet air.

He pulled himself together.

"That's it, of course. We'll have to find what goat it is, eh, Joe? Can't have the thing trampling over the garden like this."

His eyes paused at a small object projecting from the mud, and he bent down and drew it out. It appeared to be a ragged strip of some material like flannelet. It was soaked with rain, and there were dark stains upon it, and at one end was a kind of grease with a number of long black hairs sticking to it. On a sudden revulsion King let it fall. He found that he was trembling.

Joe Murgle was eyeing him with frank curiosity.

He said, "Ain't you well, Mr. King?"

"Quite well," King said abruptly.

But his flesh was crawling. He looked at the shrubbery flanking the turn of the path, and he thought, "Great God! What lies beyond? What are we going to see when that corner is turned? Something frightful has happened."

Joe Murgle had tramped on ahead. King made no effort to call the boy back. His wits were, in a way, numbed with horrid premonition. The sudden shocked outcry was powerless to add to the nausea that already consumed him.

"Mr. King! . . . Mr. King! What's that over by the labor'tory wall?"

King caught the frantic Joe by the wrist.

He said, "Steady, my boy. Steady. We mustn't get rattled. Wait a moment now. What is it, Joe? It's death, I'm afraid."

"It's Mr. Fry!" Joe said huskily.

King took a couple of deep breaths. The gently falling rain beat at his ears as though it were a flood. His sight danced for a moment, then steadied stonily.

He said, "Go and call Dr. Montague, Joe. You'll find him asleep by the fire in the sitting room. Tell him that Fry has met with some kind of accident."

As Joe raced away, King crossed to the quadrangle, and stood looking down upon the grotesquely sprawling thing that had once been Fry. The gardener was in his shirt and trousers, as though hurriedly called from his bed. He lay on his right side, his limbs crumpled under him, and his head lolling. King knew, even before he tried to raise him, that every bone in the man's body was broken. He was a sheer pulp encased in the torn sacking of his skin. Literally, he had been crushed to death. . . .

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DR. MONTAGUE, pale and distraught, presently joined King. For a little time, the scientist was almost inarticulate. He could only stammer and gesticulate. King, dreading what the old man's incaution might do, said sharply, "Undoubtedly Fry climbed to the roof and fell. Probably the gutters choked, and he got up in order to clean them. You can see where the water has overflowed down the wall. Joe—"

"God forgive me," Dr. Montague broke in. He wrung his hands. "I should have insisted last night."

King interrupted in turn. He spoke forcefully, shouting down the scientist's stammering self-accusation.

"That's right. We should have insisted upon his doing it when we knew the rain was coming. But it can't be undone now. Joe, I want you to go to the cottage at once. Tell Miss Ruth that Fry has been killed accidentally, and ask her to remain where she is until I come. Then go on to the township and find George Frobart, the policeman. Bring him here. One moment, Doctor—"

He took Joe aside.

"Joe, if I were you I wouldn't say anything about ghosts, or anything of that kind. Of course, that's more or less a lot of nonsense, and you don't want Frobart to think you've gone off your head, eh? Of course you don't. If you're asked any questions, just refer the constable to me. All you know is that Fry has apparently fallen from the roof and been killed."

Joe chattered, "You mean—"

"I mean nobody will thank us for making a mystery out of nothing," King said sternly. "I'm trying to keep you out of any trouble, Joe. What Dr. Montague is doing is nobody's business but his own. It has nothing to do with Fry's death. I want you to understand that. We don't want to get ourselves laughed at."

"No, Mr. King, we don't. I won't say a word. No fear I won't. Anybody might fall off a roof. My father nearly fell once. He—"

"Off you go," King said.

When Joe was out of sight, he said, "Well, Doctor— Good God!— The poor devil! . . . The point is, there's no proof it didn't happen as I said. It's no use—"

"Why deceive ourselves?" Dr. Montague said, in a low voice. He was more composed now. "King, what are those tracks doing in such a place? Fry met his death at the malice of the Satyr-biogen. Some fearful violence has destroyed him."

"I believe that," King said. "But it can do no good to admit it publicly. Indeed, it can only do great harm. You must surely see that for yourself, Dr. Montague."

"Morally, I am Fry's murderer," the scientist said, breathing hard.

King denied this patiently. He drew upon all his powers of persuasion. "You could not possibly guard against such a contingency. If Fry had stayed with us last night, he would have been safe and sound now. His own obstinacy destroyed him. Your view is a distorted one."

"Nevertheless—" Dr. Montague began.

"Well, then," King said gently, "are you proposing to inform the authorities that Fry was killed by a creature from another world? Will that sound sane and convincing, do you think? Or will it arouse suspicions that must inevitably end in a great deal of unpleasantness for us all?"

Dr. Montague made an agitated gesture.

"This is a case where in the general interest the truth might rigidly to be suppressed," King continued. He glanced, with a little shudder, at the crumpled outline of Fry's body under the blanket which they had spread pitifully. "Suppose you say—'This man was done to death by a Satyr, coming to earth, as I believe, from the planet Saturn. I evolved this Satyr from star dust by chemical experiment. It is still existent and it constitutes a lively danger to humanity.' Do you suppose a jury would accept such a statement? If they did not brand us as criminal lunatics, we should be extraordinarily lucky. No, Dr. Montague; the bald truth will not do. Fry is dead. His death must appear to be a natural one, in so far as accident can be said to be natural to this life. You agree?"

TO THIS anxious query the scientist only replied with a twisted smile. It was evident that he was badly shaken and that his normal common sense was still at fault.

He stared at the body.

"If not for your own sake, then for Ruth's," King pleaded. He put his hand on the other's sagging shoulder. "Think. No one would believe you. It would be making a useless martyr of the truth. Besides, it would mean an end to any hope of ridding earth of these creatures. They would escape beyond control. Our unimaginative authorities would find it necessary to enter the laboratory, to begin with. Whatever the nature of the sixth culture—and we both believe that its influence, if any, is wholly benign—such interference at this stage may be fatal. Come,

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sir. For all our sakes let us keep silence."

To his relief, Dr. Montague agreed.

"As you will, King. I consent because of the hope I have in the benevolence of the last culture—a life form emanating, as I think, from Venus. Indeed, I am certain it is from Venus; just as I am certain that the Satyr-biogen is from Saturn. Shall I tell you why?"

"Give me a few minutes first."

"What do you intend doing?" Dr. Montague asked, as King moved off briskly.

"To put it plainly, Doctor, I mean to manufacture evidence of Fry's fall. It's easily done, and I feel quite justified in doing it. Clues have been faked before for less worthy purposes."

King's first act was to fetch the ladder from the old stables and stand it against the wall of the house. Before doing so, he wet it with a bucket or two of water, so that it conformed to its rain-soaked surroundings.

With the aid of a garden rake, he first removed some of the leaf-mold that choked the gutters immediately overhead; then, resting the teeth of the rake on the edge of the guttering itself, he tore a portion of it away from the eaves. The resultant effect was as though Fry in falling had caught at the gutter to save himself, breaking it free with his weight, before again losing hold and crashing to earth.

To gain added effect, King shook out some of the crumbled mortar from the undersides of the guttering, so that it spattered at the base of the wall. With a thrust of the rake he also managed to displace two or three of the roof plates.

These preparations completed, he wiped the rake dry and clean and returned it to the toolshed. Lighting a cigarette, he rejoined Dr. Montague.

"Well, how does it look?"

The scientist said, "Really, King, the police should be tremendously grateful. Grateful not only because you have probably confined their duty to a mere coroner's inquest, but that you have not turned your talents toward crime. The effect is most convincing, I am ashamed to say."

"Great!" King rejoined. He eyed his work critically and could find no flaw. "Suppose we make ourselves a cup of tea? Then I'll slip across to the cottage and tell Ruth—no, not the truth. She has enough worry as it is."

"She will guess the truth," Dr. Montague said, as they entered the kitchen.

"In that case, it can't be helped," King said.

They were presently making a belated and anything but hearty breakfast, in the course of which the scientist's remarks recurred to King.

He said, "You were saying something about Saturn and Venus? Something about the identity of the Satyr-biogen, wasnt it?"

"Yes," Dr. Montague said. As always when interested scientifically, his depression left him. The surest way to overcome his present remorse, as King well knew, was to start some discussion of the kind. "You noticed last night, King, the suggestion of color in the Biogen forms? Exactly. I observed it some time ago, and it is distinctly evolving. In this, I believe, the clue to planetary origin will be found. Not in every case, to be sure. But in certain cases we may take it that we know beyond doubt the source whence life emanates. Curiously enough, it bears out my previous theories, which were on a purely philosophical basis."

King waited silently.

"THE ancients, King, ascribed a distinct color to each of the heavenly bodies. In the Assyrian inscriptions there is repeated reference to a pyramid belonging to the palace of Nineveh. This palace was composed of seven stages, each stage being covered with stucco of a different color.

"Each color represented a star, and the colors were built up in the order of their importance, the least important being at the base. Jupiter's color is purple; Mars, vermilion; Mercury, blue; the Sun, gold; the Moon, silver. Indeed, I may say that in those days it was believed that the entire globe of the moon was composed of pure silver."

"From which belief, I suppose, arises the present curious practice of turning one's silver to the new moon, as a courtesy to the moon's allegedly proper metal?" King ventured.

"Precisely. Now mark this, King. The color ascribed to Venus is white, and that to Saturn is black. Entire opposites. White for good, black for evil. You perceive the significance, as applying now to the Satyr and to the pure white radiance of the sixth culture? May we not in very truth say that the first is life from Saturn, and the second is life from Venus? Indeed, it would seem so.

"Here is another thought, King. The ancient god of the early Greeks was Pan. Pan, the cloven-hoofed, Pan the Satyr. In

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Central America, he was adored. Temples were built in which to sacrifice to him. In Mexico, Pan was known as 'that which is above.' Both Pan and his wife, Maia, enter into the Maya vocabulary most extensively. Saturn, Satyr, the Pan-god, black—the apotheosis of evil, wickedness incarnate. And opposed to him—by the mercy of God, now on this earth—the Venus life, white and shining as an angel—good made manifest, King. It makes me tremble—"

"If it is so—" King murmured. He was filled with awe. It seemed incredible that the scientist could be right. And yet could anything be more incredible, he thought, than the laboratory life which had been accomplished? Was it true, after all, that ancient lore held closer to the core of life than the materialistic unbelief of modern thought? The so-called myth no myth at all, but the unseen basis of good and evil—"If it is so, therein lies our salvation."

Dr. Montague said excitedly, "We saw for ourselves how the plane creatures, the Flame-germs, the linear creatures, and all the host of abominable things, gathered in the hope of attacking the Light-biogen at its birth last night.

"Wherever I look, my dear boy, I see God's Providence aiding us. A week ago they would have been able to enter the laboratory and possibly destroy the Light-biogen. They were then so far immaterial that a material barrier, such as the almost airtight laboratory, offered no resistance. But their material evolution has placed them, comparatively speaking, upon the material plane. They are powerless to compass solid matter any longer.

"The Light-biogen, which they so evidently hate and fear, is beyond their reach. It will develop and grow strong, and it will devour them, King—devour them—because Good transcends Evil—as it always will in the end."

"Amen!" King said.

They sat silently for some time.

King presently rose. "You'll be all right for a time. I'll be back to meet the police when they arrive. I should say there's no danger, now, in the daytime. Light drives the things to cover. It's the night that we have to fear."

Dr. Montague nodded.

"I'll stand by poor Fry. Fortunately he has no relatives to mourn him. He was entirely without dependents. It's none the less very sad and horrible. Shall you be long?"

"An hour at most. Keep up your heart, Doctor. Whatever the crisis is, it can't be long delayed now."

CHAPTER VII

THE SATYR

KING found Ruth waiting for him in the tiny cottage sitting room. Her hands were nervously clasped and her eyes were distressed.

She said, "Rod, is it really true that poor Fry is dead? How did it happen?"

"Appearances are that he somehow fell from the roof."

Her expression checked him. Dr. Montague had been right in saying that she would instinctively guess the truth.

He added lamely, "Of course it's impossible to say definitely—"

"Rod, I'm not a child. It was a—one of the star germs, wasn't it? Tell me the truth."

"I'm afraid so," King said. "Your father wanted Fry to join us in the sitting room, but he refused. In a sense, he brought it upon himself. By the way, where is Mrs. Puckett? Does she suspect the truth?"

"I don't think so," Ruth said. "No, I'm sure she does not. Joe was badly frightened, and so I sent Mrs. Puckett with him to the township. She, poor soul, was very upset. In a sense, I think she liked Fry. A violent death is always shocking. What is to be done, Rod?"

"Nothing. We can only sit tight. It's impossible to tell anyone the truth—what we believe to be the truth. We would all be accused either of murder or madness. As it is, there is a chance they may find it ordinary accident."

He told her what precautions he had taken, and she listened gravely.

"I suppose it's the only thing to do. But, frankly, I'm sick with apprehension. One thing is certain. Red Gates must be abandoned. Rod—"

Her calm suddenly dissolved in a flood of tears.

"It might have been you or Father," she said. "I insist on making an end to a situation so hideously dangerous. It is inconceivable that anything but evil can come of it. If I had courage enough I would burn Red Gates to the ground."

King was helpless against the tide of her near-hysterics. It was so unlike Ruth to give way like this that he wondered for a moment if she were ill. He drew her gently to his shoulder, waiting for the unaccustomed weakness to pass.

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"Why, Ruth, this won't do, you know. It's serious, I admit, but hardly as bad as all that. Don't you see it's quite impossible for us to run away, now? Your father and I have to see it through to the very best of our wits and courage. We dare not do anything else."

"It isn't *your* responsibility, at least," Ruth said. "It's Father's and mine. You could wash your hands of us, and no one would blame you."

"Now you're talking nonsense," King accused. He tilted her chin with a gentle finger. "As your husband to be, I'm starting right in now to look after you."

She did not meet his eyes.

"I never said—"

"I'm saying it for you," King said. His eyes and mouth were stern. "Have you ever been kissed by a bright and rather frightened young author? Well, it's going to happen to you now."

She said, presently, from the region of his collar, "Rod, I'm so glad you bullied me. Of course I've always loved you. I know that now."

He would have drawn her to him again, but she resisted him gently.

"Not now, Rod. It's—I mean, somehow, with poor Fry lying there. . . . In a sense, happiness now is almost indecent. . . . About leaving Red Gates, Rod. At least you can't remain there at night, after this."

"You'll never persuade your father," King said. "And naturally I shan't desert him. It's a unique opportunity, dearest. I don't suppose the history of science ever held so remarkable an opportunity for accurate study of such a vital discovery. Just think what it means to your father, apart from its hideously unforeseen aspects."

"Then I shall keep you both company," Ruth said quietly. "No, Rod—please. I mean that. Mrs. Puckett and Joe can continue to sleep at the cottage. But I shall be with you and Father. Otherwise the nights would be one long torture. I could not bear them."

At the finality in her tones, King bowed. He said, "As you wish, dearest. In a sense, I would prefer to have you right under my eye. After all, the danger may not be so great. The creatures fear light. So long as none of us ventures beyond it, we should be safe enough."

He looked at his watch, and exclaimed, "By George, I must hurry back before Joe gets there with Frobart. You'd better come with me. I don't altogether like the idea of leaving you here alone."

ON THE way King related what Dr. Montague had said concerning the colors developed by the Biogens, in their relation to the various planets. He was surprised to learn that Ruth was already familiar with a great deal of ancient astrological lore.

"You are amazing," he said.

"During Father's absence, I read it up quite solidly," the girl confessed, smiling. "Mythology has always fascinated me. Each planet you know, Rod, was assigned to a particular deity, by the Assyrians and the Babylonians. They called the god of Saturn Adar. The Chaldeans called him Alap-Shamash. All three acknowledged Sin as the god of the Moon.

"In Assyrian lore, Ishtar reigned over Venus, and in their legend of Ishtar's descent into the underworld is given their conceptions of life after death. The Chaldeans called Ishtar by the name of Ashbat. The Sun was known to them as Shamash; Jupiter as Rus; Sulpasadu for Mars; Nivet-Anu for Mercury. I forget the others.

"But the gods of Saturn and Venus were supposed always to be at war. Saturn stood mostly for evil of the licentious kind. Venus typified good. It is rather curious that Father should have associated the Light-biogen with Venus, long before it came to its present development. I hope I shall see it for myself. Your description suggests something very beautiful indeed."

King said, with a reminiscent shudder, "If you could have seen how the other creatures crowded about the laboratory, trying to force their way inside, to attack it—I am certain that was their purpose. They know it is their enemy. They are afraid of it, in some way."

They were now within sight of Red Gates.

"There's a cart standing in the drive," Ruth said.

"Mrs. Puckett has just gone into the kitchen," said King. "You had better join her there. There is no need for either of you to appear in the matter."

Ruth nodded, and turned down a side path. King continued along the main drive. Ahead of him, a small group stood talking before the dead body of Fry, from which the covering had been removed. At King's approach, the voices dropped. The policeman, Frobart, with whom King was acquainted, gave him a friendly salute.

"Bad accident this, Mr. King, eh? Have you met Dr. Ayre? He happened to be on the spot when the lad came for me, so I persuaded him to come along."

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King shook hands with the medico. Dr. Ayre, middle-aged and kindly, said, "Hardly an unbroken bone in the poor fellow's body. We were just wondering how it happened. Not the facts—those are plain enough, I should say—but the manner of it. What possessed the man to go clambering about the roofs on a pitch-dark night, and in a high wind?"

"Fry's methods were always unconventional," Dr. Montague explained quietly. "You think, then, he fell from the roof?"

Frobart said importantly, "I'm putting that in my report. He climbed up that ladder and attempted to clean the gutters out. You can see where his hold slipped and started a tile or two. He must have grabbed at the gutter and hung a moment. There's the bulge of his weight. That seems to be the truth of it."

"That's what we thought," King said.

His gaze encountered that of Joe Murgle, who hovered on the outskirts of the group. It seemed to King that the youth's left eyelid underwent a convulsion suspiciously like a wink. He frowned, and turned to watch Dr. Ayre, who was bending, now, to a more thorough examination of the gardener. As he did so, Frobart touched his arm. The policeman was jerking a thumb in the direction of the Murgle heir.

Lowering his voice, he said:

"A bit odd, that lad of yours, eh, Mr. King?"

"You think so?" King asked cautiously.

"Silly like," Frobart asserted. "Didn't seem to understand a single damn question. Harmless enough, though, eh?"

King assented with enthusiasm. "Oh, quite. Now that you mention it, Frobart, I believe he is a little wanting, as they say. But a good lad."

"No use calling *him* when the enquiry's held," the policeman said gloomily. He closed his notebook and returned it to the pocket of his tunic. "Only waste the time of the court. We shan't want him, anyway. Your evidence ought to do. I'll let you know when we want you."

"Thanks," King said absently.

His attention was on Dr. Ayre, whose examination was concluded. The old doctor wore a puzzled expression.

He said, "I can't understand how a simple fall like that could so break and bruise a man's body. It's new to my experience. If it wasn't for the evidence, I could imagine that he had been trampled to death by some heavy animal, like a cart-horse—"

"There's some rather decent whisky inside," King said. "Let's get the poor chap into the trap first, Frobart. Joe, spread those sacks on the floor. Now, then. Well, Dr. Ayre, I suppose your profession is full of surprises? Coming in for a taste, Frobart?"

Left to himself, Joe Murgle, with a sidelong glance at the cart and its gruesome contents, made for the privacy of his former bedroom.

He shivered a little at sight of Fry's crumpled bedclothing, and peered guardedly about the room before drawing up a chair to the table under the window. A cheap writing pad, with pen and ink, were to hand, and he drew these to him, and wrinkled his brows in stern attempt to concentrate his thought. He had already posted the letter written overnight, and it came to him, with a sense of almost dismay, that the very choicest news of all had found no part in it.

Unless he sent a second letter at once, by way of postscript, it would undoubtedly happen that the inhabitants of The Working Man's Residential Paradise would learn of the sensation denouement at Red Gates through alien channels.

Such a thought was not to be borne. Joe dipped his pen and began to write frantically:

Dear Mum:

Oh mum you would never guess what has happened. Fry is dead. Oh mum Mr. King said Joe fell off the roof when he was cleaning the gutter and so we must be careful to say so. Oh mum the doctor said his deth must have been simultainous. It means all at once.

Well mum I went to get the policeman his name is Mr. Frobart. He said well my lad what do you know about it. And I said I know nothing. And he said be careful my lad or you will go to jale. It is a serious thing. And I said I sware it. When we were all at Red Gates Mr. King said the boy is all right constable. I will answer for him. Yes said Dr. Montague he was with Ruth at the cottage all night. And Mr. Frobart that is the policeman looked silly.

Well mum Mr. Fry is ded and gone. But I am all right. And so no more for the present from your loving son.

Joe.

It was this letter that Frobart, wiping his mustache as he left the house, consented to post at the invitation of the breathless writer; a few hours later to be read by Mr. Murgle, with bulging eyes, to an admiring circle in the billiard room of the Working Man's Residential Paradise hostelry.

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ON THE departure of Frobart and Dr. Ayre, with their melancholy burden, King went in search of Ruth. He found her gently resisting the morbid prophesying of Mrs. Puckett, who was now frankly in terror of her surroundings.

On King's entry, the housekeeper appealed to him with tearful emphasis.

"I say that Miss Ruth oughtn't to be allowed to sleep 'ere, like she says she's going to, Mr. King. I wouldn't sleep 'ere, not in this place, not if you was to go down on your bended knees. Full of merdering ghosts and things. And the bad luck of it! Look what's 'appened to Fry. I shall dream of it if I live to be a 'undred."

Ruth said, with a pale smile, "Why, Mrs. Puckett, I shall be perfectly safe with Father and Mr. King. And, besides, we shan't be sleeping here. We shall sleep in the daytime. At night, we shall be wide awake all the time."

"What for?" Mrs. Puckett demanded, blinking.

"You know Dr. Montague is conducting certain scientific experiments," King said. "It is at night that he has to take his observations, you see. As for ghosts— Now, Mrs. Puckett, you surely don't believe that? Not really. Come now."

But the housekeeper's wits, dull enough at times, had been sharpened suspiciously by the events of the past few days.

"What 'appened to Daniel then, Mr. King? And us shifted over to your cottage at nights?"

King said, exchanging a look with Ruth, "Some experiments are rather dangerous, Mrs. Puckett. Science is a queer thing, especially when it touches matters which we do not properly understand. At times, strange happenings occur. This is one of them. But depend upon it, everything will come out all right. It wasn't a ghost that took the cat. That is to say, if he hasn't just strayed away of his own accord. If Daniel was actually taken, it was by—well, the doctor has succeeded in hatching out a kind of germ life, in the laboratory, as you know. Some of them have got out of control for the time being. They can't bother us for long, because the outside temperatures will quickly kill them."

"It can't do it quick enough for me," Mrs. Puckett declared. It was evident, however, that she could make very little sense of what King had said. "I suppose it's all right. But I 'ates these queer goings on. They ain't Christian, begging your pardon."

"If you're really at all frightened," Ruth said, fully aware of the housekeeper's unswerving loyalty, "it might be better if you left us to manage ourselves for a little time, until things settled down comfortably again. We should miss you dreadfully, but it's hardly fair that you should be worried. If—"

Mrs. Puckett was at once all indignation and hurt.

"I wouldn't 'ear of such a thing. I'm surprised at you, Miss Ruth. Well, ghosts or no ghosts, it's time I got dinner for you. So far as I can see, nobody's had much breakfast. Where's that young Joe? Ah! so there you are. Listening at the keyhole, I'll be bound. Wood is what we want, and plenty of it. With Fry gone—"

"She's a staunch old dear," Ruth said, as she and King went out into the garden. "Rod, how will it all end? I know it's foolish of me, but in the last few hours the fear I've had has been—I can't explain. It's personal, if you know what I mean. Something is going to happen—to me. Something vile and horrible. . . ."

"Nonsense!" King said sharply. But he could not avoid a sudden sick feeling. "How can anything happen to you, with all of us here together? Dearest, you're overwrought. I don't wonder at that. You're tired out. You must go back to the cottage after dinner and have a good sleep."

"Yes," Ruth said vaguely. "Perhaps you're right."

The rain had ceased and the sun was shining bravely through a rift in the heavy clouds. King pointed to it.

"Of course I'm right. Why, look there, dear heart. That's the way the sun will presently shine through our own clouds. It's practically impossible, according to your father, that the star germs can survive Earth temperatures much longer."

He felt her shake suddenly, and her clasp tighten. Seeking the cause, he saw that she was staring at the wet gravel of the path.

At the point of her boot, almost, was a single clear-cut impression of a cloven hoof.

King had an instinctive feeling that it was newly made. It had not been there, he knew, more than a few minutes at most, because the rainwater was only now beginning to seep into the depressions it made.

King fought back the exclamation that rose to his lips. He pretended not to have seen the print, and drew her gently onward. Yet his heart was sick with loathing of that unseen presence.

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Ruth said faintly, "Hadn't we better find Father? We must talk over what he wants to do. It's raining again, Rod."

King's face was grim. He came to an astonished realization of the fact that his own fear had miraculously and finally left him. He knew now only a consuming anger, a steadily growing determination to encounter the Satyr-biogen and destroy it.

How, he did not know. The occasion, he told himself, would point the way. If it cost him his own life he would remove the threat of this leering Satyr from the path of the woman he loved.

The whole menace of the creature, he believed, was directed at Ruth. It was for her, not for themselves, that they had most to care. In the recesses of his mind he heard again the bleating mirth which had accompanied their single glimpse of that goatlike horror, and his forehead was dampened with sweat. It took all his will power to thrust the vision from him.

Dr. Montague was self-absorbed and reticent, when they found him. He seemed to have aged under the shock of Fry's death, King thought. At the dinner table, he sat in a brooding silence, devoid of appetite. When spoken to, he replied in curt monosyllables.

They left him presently to himself; Ruth to return to the cottage, to get what sleep she could in readiness for a night of watching, King to stretch himself upon the sofa in the dining room. He was worn out. Within a few moments he was sound asleep.

SOME hours later, he wakened to see Dr. Montague pacing the room with short, nervous strides. It was approaching dusk, and already the light was fading. The wind had dropped; beyond the window King could see the motionless frescoe of treetops against the leaden background of the sky. A curious silence held. The air was oppressive with a sense of threat.

Seeing king awake, Dr. Montague came abruptly to a standstill. His eyes were gleaming behind their glasses, and his scant hair was rumpled above the high dome of his forehead. He interlaced his thin fingers as he spoke.

"I was about to wake you, King. It's time we made our preparations for the night. . . . You sleep soundly."

King sat up, yawning. "What makes you say that? Just now, particularly, I mean?"

"You heard nothing, then? No echo through your dreaming of a sudden loud explosion?"

"Not a sound," King said, with a puzzled frown. "I was dog-tired. I was dead to the world. Was there an explosion?"

Montague gestured.

"Come and see for yourself."

The scientist led the way into the corridor and through the side door into the quadrangle. As he stepped into the open, King's eyes widened, and his mouth gaped.

"Holy Moses! What did that?"

Practically the whole of the right wall of the laboratory had collapsed outward, as though to the impetus of a terrific driving force from within. The ground was a litter of torn masonry and broken glass. The angle of the roof sagged, and a twisted beam had fallen midway along its length.

"The extraordinary part," Dr. Montague said calmly, "is that there is no suggestion of fire. Normally an explosion ignites. In this case, as you see, nothing of the kind has happened."

King said, "The Light-biogen."

"Beyond a doubt. The force concerned, King, was of a nature unknown to earth. Its disruptiveness, I believe, was due to mental energy. There was nothing physical about it, except its effects. In my opinion the Light-biogen sounded the note of the building—that is to say, the fundamental note it naturally gave out. If you remember, Cheron, the celebrated French bass, was able to break a drinking glass into fragments simply by singing into the glass its fundamental note. The Russian bass singer, Ivanoff, used to perform the same trick."

"But a whole building of brick!" King said incredulously.

"The difference is one of magnitude only," Dr. Montague said, with quiet conviction. "The effect upon buildings—even upon human life itself—of violent concussions of the air, is well known. It is simply a matter—whether by design or chance—of attuning the note to the fundamental pitch of the building or person. I am one of those who think that the true explanation of the downfall of the walls of Jericho, at the blast of the trumpets, is to be found in the fact that Joshua had discovered the fundamental note of the masonry, and caused his buglers to sound it. As a scientific consequence, the walls collapsed.

"These things happen by chance sometimes. At the rehearsal in St. Paul's Cathedral, London, in 1852, of the music for the funeral ceremonies of the Duke of Wellington, during a note sung in unison

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by the huge choir, seven of the gas-glasses resounded the note and burst into fragments."

"You think the Light-biogen made use of this means to effect its escape from the laboratory?"

"I do," said the scientist. "It has, we may suppose, taken on some degree of materiality. Its development has been phenomenal, by comparison with the rest of the Biogens. Finding itself prevented by certain physical or material properties from making an escape, the Light-biogen would naturally resort to such midway means—by which I mean an action neither wholly material nor immaterial, but dependent upon both. At least, that is my theory."

"Have you looked inside the laboratory?"

Dr. Montague shook his head.

"Too many shadows at this hour. And that reminds me. It is high time we made our preparations for the darkness. Tonight, unless I am greatly mistaken, will see the zenith of the peril. Tonight, King, will witness the age-old struggle between good and evil. There is a melting in my bones. . . ."

"Mine, too," King muttered.

HE LOOKED soberly at the lowering sky, and shrugged his shoulders. It was, he thought, impossible to escape the threat with which the air was charged. The atmosphere was weird and unnatural, full of a parched, combustible feeling. The silence could be felt.

"Ruth?" King questioned, as they sought the sitting room.

"Joe has gone for her," Dr. Montague replied. "Mrs. Puckett will stay at the cottage, out of harm's way, I hope. Young Murgle is to be one of us. He pleaded so hard to be let stay that I could not find it in my heart to disappoint him. He is terrified almost out of his wits, but has the courage of a consuming curiosity. Well, we should not lack for light tonight."

King saw that the scientist had been busy while he himself had been sleeping. At least a dozen lamps were ranged about the room, and fuel for the fire was piled high in a corner. On the table was a large tray containing food, and the couch was occupied with rugs and pillows.

"Hang it, you've done it all already," King exclaimed. "Why didn't you wake me earlier?"

Dr. Montague smiled. "Mrs. Puckett did most of it. I wanted you to rest. You'll probably need all your wits by morning."

The door, King saw, had been wedged open to its full width. Confronting the opening, and some three feet within the room, were a number of tins arranged semicircularly. Within each was a coil of thin wire. The tins were made fast to the floor, and from each a loose lead trailed and vanished beneath the edge of the carpet.

"Magnesium wire," Dr. Montague explained. "I can ignite them in turn, as required, by means of the small battery on the ledge here, where I shall sit."

"You mean the door is to remain open?" King asked.

"All that I am able to see of these extraordinary phenomena, I certainly intend to see," Dr. Montague said. "Open or shut, the door itself is no protection. Light is the only real safeguard. Light and the providence of God."

"The magnesium flares are for an emergency?" King suggested.

"Partly that. I intend to take a flashlight or two, if at all possible, and if my nerves hold. If these creatures are recordable, I shall need the intensity and actinic power of the light of the ignited magnesium."

King said nervously, "Isn't it time Ruth came? It's growing very dark."

"I think I hear young Murgle now," the scientist said. He began methodically to light the lamps. "Yes, here they are. Will you put a match to the fire, King?"

King did so, and went, then, to meet the newcomers. He was a little alarmed at Ruth's pallor. Her manner, too, was unusual. Her eyes were vague, and her voice was curiously sing-song.

"You shouldn't have come," King chided, settling her in a chair. "You don't look as if you'd rested at all."

She gave him a fleeting smile. "I'm quite well. I had to come, you see."

She put her hand to her head, as though suddenly confused. King watched her anxiously. His mouth had gone a little dry. Some alien quality seemed to have taken possession of her, and he found it unwelcome and disturbing.

"You mean you had to be with us?"

"Yes, Rod, of course. I couldn't keep away. It kept calling me to come—calling me. . . . What on earth am I saying? How foolish I must seem. I'm so tired, though, that I feel now and then as if I were walking around and talking in my sleep."

King, wondering unhappily at the queerness of her manner, said, "You're over-

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tired. Just close your eyes and relax. That's right."

JOE MURGLE had seated himself in the corner farthest from the open door, beyond which the gloom now steadily thickened. His mouth hung open and his eyes were wide. He was not at all sure, now, that his choice had been wide. He pictured Mrs. Puckett sitting comfortably and safely before the cheeriness of the cottage oven, and envy smote him. He looked apprehensively about him, and sighed robustly.

"Well, Joseph!" King said, with assumed lightness. "And so we're to have your company, eh? Put your hat down, my lad, unless you want to twist the brim clean off it. Had your tea?"

"Yes, Mr. King, please. I mean thank you, Mr. King. . . ."

King said, "Well, what is it?"

"Mr. King, I thought—I mean, Miss Ruth—"

"What about Miss Ruth?"

With a quick glance at the girl's unconscious profile, King came close to Joe. His voice fell automatically to a whisper. Something in Joe's face brought an added qualm to his uneasiness.

"What is it, Joe?"

"She's—funny. Saying funny things, Mr. King. Mrs. Puckett got all upset, and didn't want her to go. But she would go."

"Funny things!" King echoed. He dropped to a chair beside the youth's side. "What funny things has Miss Ruth been saying? Quietly, Joe. We mustn't wake her, must we?"

Joe said hoarsely, "*Funny* things, Mr. King. She kept saying she had to go because it was calling her. And Mrs. Puckett said, 'Who's calling you, dearie?' And Miss Ruth said, 'I don't know.'"

King digested this, frowning heavily. "When was this, Joe?"

Joe gulped and said, "When she woke up, Mr. King. She came out and looked at Mrs. Puckett and me, and said, 'Why can't you leave me alone? Why do you keep calling me?' And then she got better and laughed and said, 'I'm afraid I'm not very well. Don't take any notice of me. I think we had better go now, Joe, don't you?' And I said, 'Yes, it is getting late.'"

"Miss Ruth didn't say what it was she thought was calling her, Joe?"

Young Murgle shook his head.

"No, Mr. King. Mrs. Puckett said, 'The poor lamb she is still dreaming.' But she wasn't dreaming, Mr. King."

Dr. Montague, busy with his camera apparatus, called suddenly to King. Beyond an affectionate nod at Ruth when she first entered, the scientist seemed not to have noticed her further. Certainly the strangeness of her manner had escaped him. He was, as King knew, almost solely concerned with his scientific enthusiasm.

"Yes," King answered.

He touched Ruth's hair lightly as he passed, with all his soul in his fingers. He thought her eyes flickered, but they remained closed. She seemed somehow drugged; but whether with weariness or something more to be feared, he did not know.

It was as if she had been hypnotised.

"Listen," Dr. Montague said.

From the now completely darkened corridor came the faint humming sound that had characterised the assembling of the star germs on the previous night. Now, as then, the sound filled King with an indescribable disgust. It was like the whispering of a concealed multitude of the unclean and venomous. It rose in volume like the whirr of a great spinning top, to die away into a throbbing silence.

"Not yet," Dr. Montague muttered. "The hour is too early. The things are but feeling their strength, as it might be. You saw nothing, King?"

"I fancied I saw pinpoints of color here and there, but there was nothing that had definite outline or shape."

His eyes were very bright.

Dr. Montague said, "Later on—if we come through this ordeal safely—you must read what myth and legend has to say of the noise we have just heard, King. You will find mention of it in Hesiod, and also in the Avesta, the sacred book of the ancient Persians. It is caused, these say, by the spinning of the Cross of Kronos or Saturn. Kronos is identical with the Chaldean Ea."

BEYOND that one demonstration of the Evil that lurked in the blackness beyond the circle of lamplight and firelight, nothing untoward occurred for some hours. The night held to an eerie quiet. Neither sight nor sound escaped it.

Ruth, King was delighted to find, had apparently shaken off her strange, druglike obsession. Indeed, her manner had now gone to the other extreme. Her eyes were unusually bright, and her cheeks were flushed feverishly. The effect, King believed, was probably due to some kind of mental reaction.

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He said presently, "You're all right now?"

"Quite, thanks, Rod. Why? Didn't I seem well? This is most frightfully interesting, don't you think? Father, do you really think it possible to photograph the —the Biogens?"

"Frankly—no," the scientist confessed. "But I mean to do my best, nonetheless. You see, I am not without hope."

"What a record it would make," King said enviously. "You would be furnished with indisputable proof of star life—"

"I doubt it," Dr. Montague said. He smiled dryly. "The world of science would probably accuse me of faking the plates. Still, what matter? It is the great moral issue of the affair that most concerns me now. It is the voice from the beyond that humanity has always yearned to hear, to set the seal of absolute conviction upon the poor certainty of its faith."

Ruth said, with a quivering lip, "It typifies the unending struggle between right and wrong, the forces of good and the powers of evil—between God and Satan."

Her father nodded.

"All through the Gothic legends runs the thought of the battle of Light against Darkness, and the final triumph of the Light, after a temporary death. This great solar myth underlies all the ancient mythologies. It is the primeval form of the resurrection and the life. The common belief in antiquity, as set out in universal tradition, is not to be despised. It argues the fidelity of the common memory, and the unity of the race, if it does nothing else. There is truth beyond all myth. Never doubt it."

Dr. Montague was well launched now upon his subject. He continued for some time to talk on these lines. He spoke of the nature of myths, and the significance of the ancient records; the exploits of the oldest mythological heroes; the Eddas, Sagas and Nibelungenlied; Hesiod, Aristophanes and Orpheus. King listened with intense interest, yet never for an instant relaxing his caution. All his senses were alert to catch the first intimation of aggression on the part of the intelligences that besieged their tiny oasis of light. Now and then through the dream tones of Dr. Montague's discourse, he thought to hear vague and awful movements up and down the strings of the blackness beyond.

There came silence, presently. Dr. Montague had entered into one of his habitual abstractions. His head was sunk on his breast, and his lips moved without sounds. Joe Murgle was dozing on the sofa. Ruth stirred at King's side.

"I'm so thirsty, Rod."

"We'll have some tea," Rod said briskly.

HE PUT fresh fuel on the fire and set the kettle over the blaze. As he rose to his feet, it occurred to him that the illumination of the room was less bright. The lamps had each a kind of bluish halo about them, obscuring them like a fog. He turned up the wicks till the flames flared, and the light widened again comfortingly.

Dr. Montague came out of his reverie to say, "What are you doing, King? There should be plenty of oil."

"So there is."

But his expression was puzzled. The light had fallen once more, quite perceptibly. The flame of the fire, also, had grown sullen and fitful.

"It's nearly midnight," Dr. Montague said, glancing at his watch. His face was grave. "Ruth—"

The girl looked at him, but made no reply. King saw that she was breathing as though with difficulty, and that the old drugged drowsiness had returned to her. Her expression somehow alarmed him.

"Ruth!" Dr. Montague repeated, almost fretfully.

She stirred and essayed a smile. "Yes, Father . . . yes."

"You must rouse yourself, my dear. King, prod that lad awake. That's right. The danger is here. Something is happening at last."

The darkness beyond the door had movement. Joe Murgle, seeing it, felt the roots of his hair tingling responsively. He sat as though paralyzed.

Dr. Montague said sharply, "The lights!"

"They won't go any higher," King said.

He was strangely without fear. He stood by Ruth, his hand pressing her shoulder, and his eyes fixed upon the oblong of the door.

The darkness was taking shape. It fell apart—and became of a sudden filled with the rude, nightmarish forms of the crowding star germs. The air was vibrant, charged with the breath of an incalculable malice. King was not quite sure whether the lamplight itself was failing, or whether the outside black was being thrust bodily, as it were, into the room. He only knew that the light was falling steadily. And, in spite of himself, his spine seemed crumbling under the weight of a mounting horror.

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He heard his own voice issuing drunkenly.

"Doctor—Doctor—the flare—"

Even as he spoke, a magnesium light leaped in a blinding flash. There followed a second and third. The smoke of them billowed in a heavy, acrid cloud. From the core of it came the voice of Dr. Montague, strident with excitement.

"Did you see it? Ruth—did you see it? King, where are you?"

"Here!" King called. He wiped his smarting eyes, and moved in the direction of the scientist. At his back, Joe Murgle burst into a strangled coughing. "What is it?"

He saw, now, however, for himself; and the supreme wonder of it rendered him dumb. As if by magic the smoke had vanished. The lamplight had sunk to a twilight, and dimly he could distinguish in the pit of the corridor the writhing shapes that filled it. King stared at them. A ray of purest light, like the scintillation of a great diamond, moved upon the face of the darkness. As though it were a sword point, it touched in turn the monstrous life that swam there, extinguishing it like a pricked bubble.

A planet creature, pulsing its terror, crossed the threshold of the room. The light-ray lengthened and pierced it into nothingness, almost at King's feet. The air of the corridor shook with the anguish of an unnatural convulsion. It seemed to swell and then recede. And was presently still, without movement, or sight or sound. . . .

Dr. Montague was crying, "The Light-biogen! The Urim and Thummin. The Light and the Perfection!"

He was hopping with the sheer intensity of his scientific ardor. "King! You saw it? The hypostatis! The very essence and personality of the godhead!"

King was dazed. The lamplight was slowly returning to normal. He turned his eyes from the fervor of Dr. Montague, to glimpse the chalk-white face of Joe Murgle. A thought was beating at the back of his brain, but for the moment he could not focus it. There was something revolting in the room. His nostrils were curling to the echo of mephitic stench—

And suddenly, sickeningly, his brain cleared. He said, "Ruth! God in Heaven! Where's Ruth!"

"Eh!" Dr. Montague stammered.

He came and stood at King's elbow, peering at the empty chair. His face grew ashen.

"She isn't here."

Joe Murgle came, walking a little blindly, from the corner where he had been crouching. King automatically thrust out a hand, or the boy would have fallen.

"Mr. King. . . ."

"Yes!" King whispered, with dry lips.

"Miss Ruth, Mr. King— It was the—the goat, Mr. King. It came in—"

King said, now with an awful calm, "Something came and took her away? Is that what you mean? Don't be frightened."

"I couldn't stop it," Joe Murgle said. "A thing like a goat. It smelled. . . ."

He sat his shaking body on the sofa, and began to blubber.

CHAPTER VIII

THE SYMBOL OF EVIL

"THE SATYR!" Dr. Montague said. The shock of his daughter's disappearance smote him deeply. He was reduced in an instant from a state of almost arrogant triumph to a nerveless condition pitiful to witness. All his initiative seemed to have deserted him. He stumbled from side to side of the room, wringing his hands.

"King, what is to be done? What is to be done? I never dreamed of this."

King said, with a haggard look, "What is to be done! Why, what do you think? What have you done with the torch?"

He snatched it from the trembling hand of the scientist, and strode to the door.

"What do you mean to do?" Dr. Montague cried.

"Search till I find her," King said. "Do you think I care what happens now?"

"Wait," Dr. Montague said. His hands fumbled at the bookshelves and came away clutching a pocket Testament. The trappings of scholarship had fallen from him like a garment discarded, leaving only the man, starkly human. "Together, King. We three—Joe, my boy, come quickly. Now, King."

The corridor was sunk in heavy gloom. But now no terror lurked within its inky folds. The air was miraculously released of former threat. There was no sound but the tread of their feet, and no light but that of the torch in King's hand.

"Where to?" Dr. Montague asked. His voice was firmer. "We must keep together."

King's impulse was to run shouting in pursuit, but the manifest folly of this restrained him. The need for caution had

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never been greater. The lesser Biogens, he knew, had been destroyed by the beneficent sword-ray of the Light-biogen; the Urim, as Dr. Montague called it.

So far as earth was concerned, at least, they were dead. The strange Flame-biogen —sensitive metabolisms that shortened at the approach of sound, and danced grotesquely at the rise and fall of speech—the geometrical creatures, the ectoplasms, the one-dimensioned and two-dimensioned monstrosities, and others too bizarre to permit of description; no longer would earth suffer threat of them. But the most potent for evil of all that travesty of life, the most powerful and most wicked, still lived. Somewhere in the darkness about them the great Satyr stamped goatlike, with Ruth held in noisome embrace.

King choked at the thought of the girl's peril. An agony of fear swept him lest she was already, by some law of interstellar physics, removed forever from earthly aid. The thought pierced his mind like a white-hot wire, so that he groaned aloud.

Dr. Montague, at his side, said, "Courage, Rod. What was it she said, herself? Can you remember? We had been talking about the Biogen, the mind-stuff. And Ruth said, 'It is a question not of research, but of religion. Our minds against theirs. Let us deny evil and admit good!'"

"I remember," King said.

"The Light-biogen," Dr. Montague said. "The Urim. Surely it is God's providence taken shape to save his creatures, made in His own image. See, I fear no longer. When has the Light ever failed to overcome the Darkness? It will not fail now. God cannot deny Himself."

"Amen! We will search from room to room, and from corner to corner. Frightened, Joe?"

"Not very much, Mr. King," Joe said. But his teeth chattered a little. "I'd like to have a go at that goat thing, I would. I ain't afeared of no goat."

"Nor I," King said. Dr. Montague's assurance had not been without its effect. Courage was flowing back into his veins. "Let your thoughts say that, Joe, old man, with all your strength. Evil cannot harm Miss Ruth. It *cannot*. Now then—keep your eyes and ears open."

Each room was visited in turn. But the beams of the torch revealed no sign of the girl. The darkness unfolded upon emptiness and silence.

King called now and then, in a shaking voice, "Ruth— Can you hear me? Are you anywhere near? Can you touch me?"

Joe glanced at King fearfully, as if suspecting his sanity. "How can she touch him when she ain't here? He can see that."

Dr. Montague, however, immediately caught at the terrified thought in King's mind.

He said, "You're thinking of Daniel. But it wasn't the Satyr that destroyed the cat. It was a geometric creature, probably; or the ectoplasmic germ that tried to envelop Joe at the tower window. Ruth's visibility isn't in question. She's still in the flesh, wherever she is. I am certain of it."

"How *can* you be certain of it?" King fumed. But he immediately took fresh hold of his fretting temper. "We must hurry on. Joe, keep close to us."

The search had narrowed to the upper story. They ascended the stairs and entered the short tunnel of the corridor, seeming now to move through an endless universe of darkness and silence. The ray of the torch had grown stunted and thin.

It was no longer fanlike, but ended abruptly in a pallid splotch, as though it pressed always against some impalpable obstacle. The curtain of night had about it a curious suggestion of elasticity. It appeared at times to flow, after the manner of a turgid black stream, impending their progress. It closed around them, as water closes, with a smooth and icy deliberation. The air had staled. And the lean torch-light drew from the nooks and corners an endless succession of crazily dancing shadows.

THE rooms on either side of the corridor were starkly empty. Their space appeared to overwhelm and suffocate the already diminishing beam of the torch in King's hand. As he regained the corridor, the beam faded wholly. He stood blindly in a pit of soot, with tautened eardrums and racing pulses. Dr. Montague's heavy breath was on his neck, and the drumming of the darkness echoed the sudden scared whimper that came from Joe Murgle.

"Battery failed," Dr. Montague said, speaking with evident restraint.

"No," King said. He worked the tiny switch unavailingly. "It was fresh in, this evening. I attended to that purposely. It's failed, but not in the ordinary sense. It's—see here. . . ."

He held the torch with the globe uppermost. There came from it a faint smudge, like a pale mist.

"The battery is still working. Something has killed the light itself."

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Dr. Montague said, "We can easily determine that. Matches, Joe? No; give them to me."

He struck one. It spluttered like a damp fuse, leaving only a phosphorescence on the fabric of the dark. There was not even a suggestion of flame. He struck match after match, with the same result.

"I'm afraid you're right, King. It appears to be a matter of atmospherics. Wait a minute. Shut your eyes tight, Joe. That will get them used to the darkness a little. Just where are we standing, King?"

King was already fumbling to find the handle of the tower-room door. His fingers closed upon it as he replied.

"We're at the tower room. Light or dark, we're going on. You might try a match here and there, doctor. Just for luck."

King's voice was steady, but his brain was racing. The breath rasped in his throat, his eyes burned in vain attempt to pierce the sightless space beyond the opened door. An odor, coarsely perceptible, fouled his nostrils.

He had had a moment of added nausea on first encountering the handle of the door. It came to him, with a sense of horrified impotence, that the door was made fast against his entry, by some demoniac agency, as had apparently been the case following their first discovery in the corridor of the cloven hoofprint.

His relief on finding that the door yielded readily, was immense. But this relief subsided almost at once. It merely proved, he decided, that the Satyr had withdrawn into still more inaccessible regions of darkness.

Yet the malign influences of the Thing were already in evidence. As King, his arm linked in Dr. Montague's, groped his way through the inky obscurity towards the tower ladder, he could feel the menace of unseen eyes. The triggers of his nerves were cocked, as it might be, to instant explosion.

The wall of night had a pulpiness, a semi-solidity, that was having actual effect.

It expanded and deepened as he moved, inch by inch, into the core of it. They had traversed half the length of the room only, he calculated, when his opposing influence hardened against their further progress like a barrier of stone.

He came to a halt, thrusting out his hand to touch this amazing obstruction, while telling himself that it did not, could not exist. Nor did it, in the experience of his physical senses. His thrusting hand was checked not by contact, but by state. It became leaden and rigid. And this feeling was presently extended to his whole body. In vain he exerted his will to move forward. The sweat of defeat bathed his face. No actual barrier of stone could have held him more securely.

At his back, Dr. Montague said thickly, "I can hardly breathe. The air is suffocating."

A hand clutched King's. He knew it for that of Joe Murgle, and an odd sympathy stirred him.

He muttered, "It's all right, Joe—it's all right. Shame to bring you into this. Nothing to gain."

"Mr. King. It's—pushing me."

King, emerged from a daze, was aware that they were all three again in motion. But now it was not of their own volition, nor in the desired direction. They were being crowded backward by almost imperceptible degrees. A terrible strength was being poured against them out of the impenetrable void, spreading its icy tentacles upon them, wrapping the curtain of the dark about them like a terrible shroud.

The name coiled like a spring at the back of King's aching throat, released itself in a single despairing cry.

"Ruth!"

He knew, somehow, that Dr. Montague was holding aloft his tiny pocket Testament. But no sound escaped the old man. But for the echoes of his own cry, and the ague of Joe Murgle's horror, King's ears were blank.

His eyes, however, were growing sensible of a steadily diminishing obscurity at one point. An oval of grayness had appeared. It whitened steadily; containing itself compactly, after the manner of a spotlight. King saw—

He thought, for a single instant, that madness had touched his brain.

He saw, clinging halfway up the tower ladder, the gross bulk of a Thing half man, half goat. The head, with its stiff, pointed ears, and shaggy beard, was turned towards them. One hairy arm was about a rung of the ladder, the other supported the crumpled body of the girl. King had an instant's agonized glimpse of her deathly face, with its closed eyelids, before the vision was blotted out as by an inky curtain released.

He tried to call out. He tried to burst the bonds of his physical weakness. He could do neither. He was turned to stone, with no life left to him, it seemed, save to his ears, wherein rang the horror of a

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bleating laughter. He had a feeling that he was dead, and that Hell was all about him.

How long this bitterness assailed him, he never knew. He was all at once staring at a new appearance. On the white plaster of the wall shone a great orbicular, wheel-like plate.

Dr. Montague's voice came hoarsely into the silence.

"The wheel symbol of Kronos and Saturn. The sign manual of Satan."

The scientist choked. His thin fingers bit into King's shoulder. His voice rose to a scream of thanksgiving.

"Look! Look! Praise be to God! The Cross Tau—the symbol of symbols. The hidden wisdom of the true Cross. . . ."

As oval of purest light had fallen directly over the image of the wheel symbol of Kronos. Within the oval, and gleaming with the fervour of a great immaculate diamond, was the letter *T*, set upon the frustrum of a cone. The mystical Tau of hallowed antiquity, emblem of creative power and eternity, of heaven and immortality. The traditional symbol used by earthborn, primeval man, to express a belief in the resurrection and the life to come.

But of this truth, with its sweet savour of Eden, King was to acquaint himself later. Now he watched, as in a dream, the slow inexorable erasing of the satanic symbol of the Cross Tau. Presently it alone remained to blaze supremely for an instant, before itself vanishing.

There was an elixir in King's veins. His senses were fully restored, and the burden of the malignant influence no longer restrained him.

The scientist whispered tremulously, "Wait. Not yet. Be sure that Ruth is safe. The symbols were but the gauge of the battle to come."

He drew King and the half-fainting boy into the recess of the corridor.

He said, with tears in his voice, "The oldest fight in the world. The fight between Light and Darkness. Between Good—for the sake of man that He created in His own image—and Evil that would destroy man. See, my friends. The frum. . . ."

OVER the jet background of the night moved, with infinite precision, the exquisite radiance of the Light-Ray. It was, King thought, as though a shining sword were being drawn slowly athwart the darkness in an ever-narrowing circle. In its wake, a line of white fire clung to the air to form a kind of asymmetric structure, after the manner of a spiral nebula. And within this barrier, which was shaped from above and extended inexorably downward, there seemed to dart a great bulk that was more black than night itself.

Beneath the devouring eye of the Urim's purpose the Satyr was turning frantically, as in a cage. The space in which it moved was alive with tiny sparks. There was no sound, but a hideous stench swelled the air. The darkness heaved like a turbulent sea.

The shining spiral, which as yet gave out no light beyond its own outline, grew steadily. King had an impression that the thin convolutions would presently multiply to such an extent that they would become fused, as it might be, into a cone-shaped whole.

He watched it fascinatedly. But suddenly his attention turned to the shape that bulked beneath. The Satyr, he decided, was perceptibly closer to the doorway and to themselves. The whole of the creature's influences appeared to focus themselves towards escape there.

Its outline became grosser each second. And, as if in recognition, the gyrations of the Light-Spiral quickened. A bell-like note came from it. It was answered by a sound so bestial that the blood in the veins of the watching humans was chilled with dread. From the vortex issued a trickle of bleating laughter. Inch by inch, the Satyr was dragging itself clear of the labouring spiral.

The dreadful fact was apparent that in the direction of the doorway lay, for some reason, the Urim's weakness. Its bell-like voice deepened. King, rigid with apprehension, sensed therein a note of appeal. But, for the life of him, he knew not how to respond.

While he fretted impotently, he was suddenly thrust aside. Dr. Montague stood in the open doorway. In the faint glow that now pervaded the room, King saw that the scientist held aloft the opened pages of the Testament. Intentionally or otherwise, his attitude took on the appearance of a cross. His voice broke sharply through the eerie murmurings of the supernatural conflict.

"In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen."

The effect, it seemed to King, was instantaneous. The black horror that was the Satyr dwindled and became without

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shape—a furiously palpitating amorphous, from the core of which arose a snarling deformity of sound.

The spiral of the Urim had come together in a cone of glorious radiance. So overpowering was the light that King was blinded. He threw up his hands to shield his eyes. As he did so, the air shook to a single sharp concussion. Darkness rushed back into the room like an inky flood. His last impression, as he lost consciousness, was of an overpowering mephitic putrescence.

He came to himself to find Joe Murgle tugging at his arm.

"Mr. King! Mr. King!"

King said shakily, "Where's Dr. Montague?"

"Here," the scientist replied. "Hush. Something is stirring."

He seemed to crawl to King's side. The three crouched in silent awe, staring at where a gray mist struggled against the blackness. Little by little, it resolved itself into the outline of a face—a face of ineffable sweetness—neither of man nor of woman—unearthly in its beauty and purity—angelic. The wide, luminous eyes surveyed them almost sadly, but the lips smiled. They seemed, King thought, to move in wistful benediction.

The vision lasted but a moment. It was replaced by the glowing symbol of the Cross Tau. It, too, faded and vanished. A little breeze of fresh, sweet air lingered on their faces, and was gone.

King whispered, "There's still a light."

"It's the dawn," Dr. Montague said.

His face was buried in his hands, as though he were praying.

"Miss Ruth," Joe Murgle said.

King was already on his feet. He climbed the ladder soberly, and presently stood in the little loft of the tower. Beyond the narrow windows, the light was widening fast. A bird chirped from the eaves, and the tops of the trees were a sea of jasper floating to meet the sapphire horizon of the sky. The scents of Arcady rose from an earth still warm with dreaming.

Ruth lay sleeping on the floor by the window. Her head was pillowed on her arm, and the wind that slid over the sill paused to touch her hair. Her cheek was faintly flushed, and she breathed as easily and quietly as a child.

King fell on his knees and raised her gently in his arms. She opened her eyes and smiled.

For a long moment, then, King was unable to speak. His arms tightened around her, and when she murmured his name, he kissed her on the lips. At last he raised his head.

He said chokingly, "You're safe! You're *safe!* The Satyr is dead."

The dread name roused her fully.

"Dead! But that— Of course, Rod. I was hideously afraid. And then, somehow, it was gone from me. Do you believe in angels, Rod? Or what was it that lifted me from the Satyr's arms and carried me here? I wasn't afraid any more, then. I was only dreadfully tired and sleepy. I knew it was going to be all right."

"It was the Light-Ray—the Urim," King said.

As he drew her to her feet, Dr Montague said anxiously from below, "King—have you found her?"

"Safe and well," King answered. "I'm bringing her down to you."

Suddenly, reaction came. Ruth clung to him in a storm of weeping.

"Rod! I thought I should have died—"

He held her tightly. "The world is all clean and sweet again. See, my dearest. The sun is coming. The blessed light. . . ."

"NOISE! Damn kids!" said Mr. Murgle. He stood scowling on the porch of his home. The days were lengthening, and the Working Man's Residential Paradise was only then beginning to settle into the soft, enveloping twilight. Here and there, lights twinkled. The smell of cooking gas would have delighted any member of the Board who might have happened—although only by mistake—to be motoring homeward via the locality.

Jane Murgle, whose left hand held the ear of Horace, and whose right hand clutched the exercise book devoted to her home lessons, replied to her sire tartly.

"Well, you try doing your 'rithmetic and being a nursemaid at the same time. That's all I've got to say. Little Hermie, you come in out of that gutter."

"I won't be argued with," Mr. Murgle said. He waved majestically a large, brick-sore forefinger. "Tea ready?"

The voice of Mrs. Murgle, anemic with apprehension and the stress of cooking, issued from the end of the passage.

"Nearly ready, Father. Jane, can't you stop 'orace shouting like that?"

Mr. Murgle turned to regard his son. At the moment, Horace was in combat with his sister, and whatever he had been saying was no longer understandable. He was not, however, silent.

"What's he saying?" Mr. Murgle demanded.

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Horace, evading the smothering hand of his sister, resumed his chanting with relish.

"Joe's coming 'ome Chewsday. Joe's coming 'ome on Chewsday. Joe's coming 'ome—"

A spiteful twist of his ear turned the chant into a wail. Little Hermie, hastily abandoning a survey of her mud-stained lower portions, elevated her face. Her eyes disappeared and her mouth became a widening circle. As the first of a succession of piercing screams smote the outraged ears of her progenitor, the unbalance of her eager grief sent her toppling bodily into the gutter.

"A man's 'ome—" Mr. Murgle began.

Jane Murgle, thrusting him aside, withdrew Little Hermie from her moist predicament, like a garment plucked from the washtub. With the dripping infant under her arm, she stalked inside in a silent fury. Horace, sobered by tragedy, clattered in her wake.

"—ain't his own," Mr. Murgle concluded loudly. "That's what it is. A man's 'ome ain't his own. Always the same. Noise. Kids. Mouths to feed. . . ."

He thrust himself presently under the kitchen tap. Still muttering he polished himself with a towel, and took his seat at the head of the table.

He sat a moment in gloomy silence, until small Horace, in the process of seating himself, upset a glass. A wordless sound escaped Mr. Murgle's lips.

Mrs. Murgle, advancing timidly with a plate of sausages, as though it were a votive offering, said, "I can't 'elp it. They won't be good. It's the excitement."

"What excitement?" Mr. Murgle asked. "I don't see no excitement. Jane, pass the mustard."

"Letter from Joe," his wife said. "He's coming 'ome next Toosday."

"What!" Mr. Murgle said. His brow darkened. "Sacked! I knew it."

Mrs. Murgle shook her head.

"Not sacked, Father. The people are giving up the house. Joe ain't wanted any more."

"Joe's seen the devil," Jane Murgle announced.

"What!" Mr. Murgle said.

"'Nother sorsage?" Mrs. Murgle invited hastily. "Jane, don't you go frightening 'Orace. I won't have it. Here's Joe's letter, Father."

Mr. Murgle took it with a stern hand. Undeterred by the process of mastication he began to read out loud.

"Dear Mum:

Mum I'm coming home on Tuesday. I've seen the devil. At least Mr. King said it wasn't the real devil mum it will be by the midday train I think. But I'll let you know. Well mum Mr. King said it is a thing we can't understand Joe and so we will be wise not to say much about it. Becos people will not understand Joe. And I said that is alright. You can rely on me. And he said the doctor is very pleased with you Joe. You are to have a bonus of five pounds. We are sorry to lose you and Mrs. Puckett but we are all going away.

Well mum I must tell you all about it. The star germs got out of the laboratory, you see. You see there was a good germ but all the rest were bad germs. And the good germ killed all the bad germs but one that was a goat. Well mum it was a very dark nite. Mr. King said to me Joe we need you with us. You are not afrade but the doctor and I are afrade. We will all sit in Miss Ruth's room and we will have plenty of light. Becos they do not like the light Joe. Evil loves the dark. And I said I am on your side. Do not fear. And he said it is a great comfort to have a fine man like you to help us Joe. And I said why should I deny it."

MR. MURGLE raised a purple and bewildered face.

"What's he talking about? I said before, and I say it agin. Joe's delirious. That's what he is. Goats and germs."

He glared about him in an exasperated fashion, as if he expected to find his ailing son in the room. His eyes lighted on his wife, and she essayed a weak smile.

"'Nother cup er tea, Father," said Mrs. Murgle. "Jane, don't let Little 'Ermie suck the jam knife. Well, Father, I don't know what Joe means. You read it."

"Ain't I reading it?" Mr. Murgle enquired truculently.

He gulped at his tea, wiped his moustache, and resumed:

"Well mum I wish Jane could have been there she would have screamed with fear. But I was not afrade.

Well mum we all sat in the room except Mrs. Puckett. She thought it would be safer in Mr. King's cottage and so she was there. It grew darker and darker.

And all at once all the star germs tried to get in but another germ came and killed them. And Dr. Montague tried to take a flashlight photo and it made a noise and I nearly choked with the smoke.

But the photo is no good. There is nothing on the plate, Mr. King said. And I can't understand that Joe becos the germs were half of this world you know. But there it is all for the best.

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And Miss Ruth said I am sure it is. We want to forget all about it. And Mr. King said yes darling we will do our best. But he was not talking to me then he was talking to Miss Ruth."

Mr. Murgle cleared his throat noisily and turned to the next page.

"Well mum all of sudden Mr. King said where is Ruth? And she was gone. The Satire had got her. It had a dreadful smell like the big drain at the back of Billy Jones place. You know when Billy got the diptheria. Well it was like that. And I said we will get her back. Come at once.

Lead on Joe said the doctor. Well mum we searched all over the house and miss Ruth was not there. And so we went to the tower room and the Satire was there. It was the devil. It had a horrible face. The germ that killed the other germs was there too and they began to fite and fite. And there was a thunderstorm. And the other germ that is the good germ won the fite.

And Miss Ruth said today it was an angel Joe. And I said yes I know that.

But when they were fiting she was not there. She was in the tower where the Satire had put her. And after the fite was all over I went to find her. And she opened her eyes and said I knew you would come Joe. And I said don't mention it Miss Ruth."

"'Ow much more of this is there?" Mr. Murgle interpolated disgustedly.

"Only another page, father," said Mrs. Murgle.

"I'll tell you what it is," Mr. Murgle said. "Joe's sickening for something. When I was sickening the time I 'ad the fever I torked a lot of nonsense. You can tell how ill I must 'a been. Fancy me torkin' nonsense. I've told that to chaps and they wouldn't believe it. It's a fact. Well, then—" Mr. Murgle read:

"Well mum I'll be home on Tuesday. Emily that is Mrs. Puckett's neece is going to write to me and I said Emily I will write to you too. Becos mum she is a fine girl and you will like her.

Well mum Mr. King and Miss Ruth are going to be married today the minister is coming up from town. And Mrs. Puckett has made a cake. I am bringing some home for Horace and Little Hermie.

Well mum I will be home on Tuesday. I have no more news so will now close from your loving son.

Joseph Murgle."

THE little silence that followed was broken by Jane. She said, glancing at Little Hermie, who slumbered with her head in her plate:

"Now that's over I suppose I can get on with my homework."

"Jane," said Mrs. Murgle plaintively, "don't be disreputable to your father."

Mr. Murgle stood up heavily.

He said, "Don't mind me. I'm nobody in me own house. Where's me 'at?"

He banged the table with his fist. The result was disastrous. Horace dozing, and Little Hermie asleep, awoke simultaneously. The air was rent with their united complaints.

"Damn kids," Mr. Murgle said. "Noise!"

He slammed the door as he went out.

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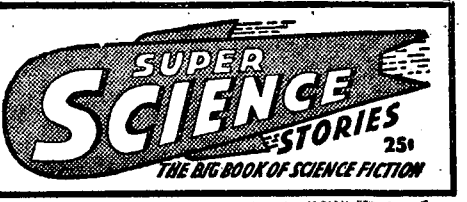

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A PRIEST OF QUICHE

Step by step, he had repeated the evil life pattern of the ancestor whose face he wore. . . . Must he, helpless, accept the same fate, even to the unspeakable end?

By Francis James

FURLONG had been back only a few days, and I had seen him twice, fleetingly, as he rushed by in a cloud of mystery and reporters, when he held me up that afternoon at the club. Of course I had been dying to get at my famous friend, as, no doubt, had some thousands of others in the big town, but I would have proposed something very different.

A little dinner at some quiet place with really good music, like Morosini's, and then a long evening by the fireside—my bachelor fireside, and a stealthy, priceless bottle or two with the cigars on the low table. Just ourselves to refurbish the old days and let him spin his latest yarns. But as for what *did* happen—if I had known beforehand—I'm not quite sure.

It was just about dusk, and I was going through the bar—crossing that dimmed and ghostly area where in Auld Lang Syne, before Furlong had last gone, lights had twinkled, corks and voices popped, and half a hundred kinds of mirth swished lusciously—when he hailed me.

"Say, Dick"—and then he ran up and clapped his hand on my shoulder just as years ago—"Dicky," he repeated, "you're a doctor! Come to dinner with me!"

Just as casual as that, after three years! Furlong was usually casual, even when taming cannibals; he never said anything without reason; his eyes sparkled.

"Yes," I said. "Thanks; but you're not sick."

"No. Meet some people."

"I don't want to," I said. "I'd like to have an evening with you, but not a crowd. And if my being a doctor has anything to do with it, I don't want any more patients, and I'm sick of being unprofessionally polite. Why can't we—"

"That," intruded Furlong, "will keep. Later, we'll do it. But this—well, I've roamed about a bit, you know, and I give you my word—never mind! Tell you on the road. You've got to go, anyway, and it's miles out, so *pronto!*"

"Why can't *that* wait," I insisted, "and we have *our* party first?"

Furlong hesitated, and then leaned forward and lowered his voice mysteriously. He whispered one word.

"Eh?" I blurted. "Not really."

"Think so," he grinned. "You're a psychiatrist. Want an opinion. Most wonderful case, anyway. Meet you in five minutes."

* * *

What Charlie Furlong had said about knocking around was emphatically true. He was one of those eccentric geniuses—or crazy freaks, according to your philosophical slant on life—whose chief joy is to drop unceremoniously out of sight, go skidding off somewhere half round the globe, get himself wrecked or lost or fractionally butchered by totally unknown savages, and then bob serenely back, upset matured plans for a memorial over the club fireplace, write, lecture, and talk unremuneratively about it for a while—Charlie was worth millions, and did it

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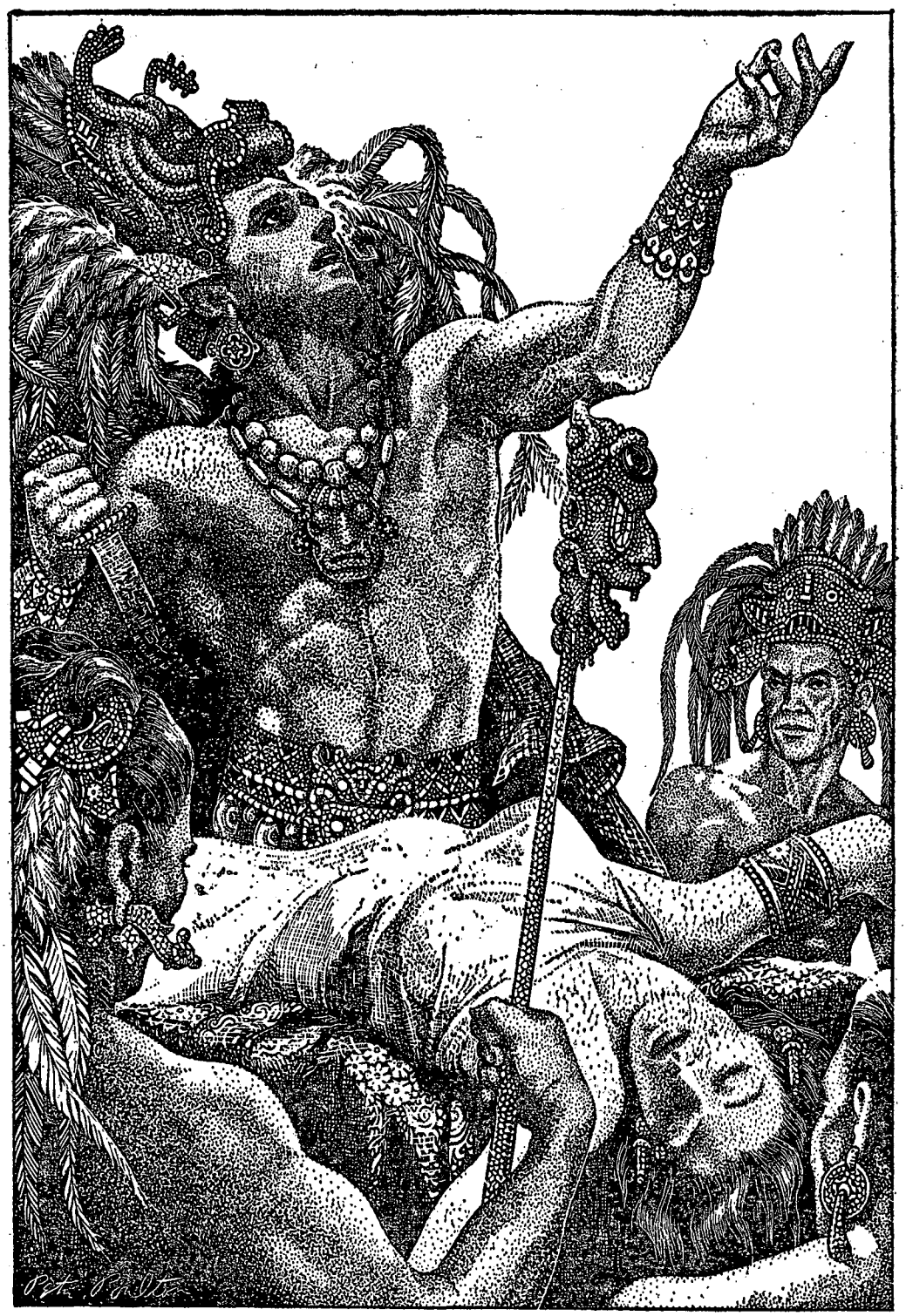

"I took from my girdle the sacrificial knife
. . . and faced the great sun-god himself. . . .

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for pure fun—and then, did it again!

Of course one of the results was that he was, even to those who didn't love him for himself, most fascinating company. He would have been that even if his amazing faculty of picking up friends hadn't given double spice to all his narratives. But as it is, I wager there isn't a city in the world, big or little, where he wouldn't strike an acquaintance in a quarter of an hour after a landing. That lent a tremendous veracity and honest-to-goodness atmosphere to his yarns. With a dozen words he could bring up those white-turbaned Afghan dervishes so that you fairly heard them screech.

But after all, this isn't to be a revamp of anything he ever told me, nor even a story about him, in the first instance. It's the tale of the queer, queer mess we got mixed up in that night after I had allowed the boy to bring my hat and coat and had climbed into Charlie's limousine alongside of him.

It was a ghoulish mess, and it was the direct and logical sequence of my friend's keenness to pick acquaintances and then to rush and poke his nose into the trap-door guarding their private family skeletons. A mess right in old New York, that before the finish had yanked us back two or three dozen centuries into a set of pictures that it's safe to say no living souls but those present had ever dreamed of.

Furlong had promised to tell me all about it on the way out to Long Island, and there was plenty of time for him to do so, but once on the road he led the conversation into other topics, merely remarking that our host was a development engineer named Mannering, whom he had met somewhere south of the Rio Grande, now home for a vacation. As to the rest, he had decided to let me make an unprejudiced judgment.

"He's just been married," murmured Furlong, as we rolled through the massive stone gates and up the drive; "and just wait till you see the bride! If you don't agree—"

"By that you mean, I suppose," I interrupted, "that she's a frump. Mannering must be fairly old—"

Furlong glowered at me a second, then guffawed.

"Our host," he said severely, "in spite of his successes, and reputation, is just a trifle over thirty, and a wonderful fellow. None better to be found above ground. Here we are!"

THE HOUSE, as I could see by the faint halo of light spreading outward from the windows, was a fine, square, old-fashioned affair, cheerfully white-painted, flower-framed, and surrounded by exquisitely kept grounds. The rattle of laughter and conversation from within showed that we were not to be the only guests.

The truth of the matter was that there were nearly a dozen others. I had not much more than been introduced to them and chatted a moment with the Manneringings, when the big white double doors were opened and dinner was announced.

And right there, as we started out, the thing began. It was Mannering himself who unconsciously set the ball rolling. As he passed the corner of the table he pointed to a Malay sword over the sideboard. The moment before the conversation had capriciously veered to the subject of daggers, ancient and modern. Our host was making his contribution.

"Speaking of swords, that little trinket up there came near teaching me more of cutting tools, first-hand, than I ever care to know. I took it away from a six-foot yellow ruffian who slipped over our rail one night down in Sibiguey Bay."

Of course at that everyone paused and glanced up. Several murmured polite commonplaces of admiration. Still, Malay creeses aren't so extraordinary, even in New York. In a moment they were looking for their places. All but the squat, broad-shouldered individual immediately ahead of us, whose name, I recalled, was Del Quiche. He had begun to laugh quietly, showing a wide curve of snowy teeth between his red lips, and narrowing his eyes.

"It's wicked," he admitted, in a curiously smooth, half chuckling way, "but judging from the records, our old ancestors—my old ancestors—could go it a little better. They had one unpleasant habit, you know, those great, lost nations that lived in Central America during the civilization."

Furlong picked him up as he pulled out his chair.

"Yes; they were a bit crude in some things, undeniably. Take the matter of religious worship—"

"They worshipped the sun, and they sacrificed to him."

"Human offerings, once a month, was the system, wasn't it?"

"I believe so. And the knives they used for that—I've seen one—"

I glanced down at Lucia Mannering beside me in the doorway, her slender fin-

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gers on my arm. Afterward I heard the romance. Mannering, so the story went, who had vowed never to marry, was doing Costa Rica along with the rest of the Isthmus on a weary railroading survey, when he had found her tucked away in the midst of a rose garden in sun-kissed San José.

They had taught each other to conjugate "I love" in three tenses before her mother found them kissing. After that, according to Costa Rican proprieties, it became a necessity to announce an engagement.

Lucia was petite, darkly and rosily beautiful. Spanishly coquettish, but blissfully wrapped up in her bronzed and handsome husband.

I fancied she had shuddered faintly at this last point. It was a rather ghoulish topic, and I attempted a diversion.

"Señor Del Quiche," I inquired, "is a Mexican?"

She shook her head.

"No; he is Costa Rican, like myself. But we had never met till my husband became acquainted with him after our marriage. He is very rich, and comes to the north looking for opportunities to—to invest."

Mrs. Armitage, six months' bride of the young army captain at my left, had perversely taken the fellow up.

"Your ancestors, *señor?*"

I handed Lucia into her seat. The Costa Rican was directly across from us.

"The Quiches," he smiled, shaking out his napkin and looking at his hostess instead of the captain's wife as he answered, "were one of the smaller tribes that alongside the Mayas and the Aztecs and some others, populated the Isthmus when the old life was at its height. There was a caste of priests who served the fires, the religious dances, and the sacrifices. The office was hereditary, and jealously guarded, and the priests themselves formed the aristocracy of the nation. They were a curious lot, according to modern standards, those warrior sacerdotal chaps. We have quite a number of likenesses of them. Take this, for instance."

He fumbled in his vest pocket, and tossed something onto the table. It was an innocent affair—merely a curio—a little figure of blood-red tourmaline, the size, all over, of a twenty-five-cent piece. A heathen idol, and nothing more, new to none of the party, and duplicated probably scores of times in museums within a few miles; yet its appearance undeniably created a sensation.

It may quite possibly have been the marvelous workmanship of the thing, or its sudden and dazzling crimson brilliancy against the white cloth as it blazed and palpitated with ruddy light like a thing alive. It may have been—something else.

I found myself holding my breath and craning forward like the rest. It was the head-and-shoulder profile of an Aztec priest—the traditional long and fleshy nose, the low and sharply sloping forehead, the smooth, unbroken sweep of line from the tip of one to the crest of the other. The eye, a tiny, sparkling brilliant, was deep-set under beetling brows; the lips prominent and thin. For a moment it rested in dead silence, grinning wickedly. It was an exquisite, sinister thing.

One of the ladies cut into the awed hush with a sharp, breathless little gasp. She had just glanced up from the idol to its owner's face.

I knew, as my eyes followed hers, what it was that had gotten me in the first place. It was damned funny.

Captain Armitage's features were a study in repressed excitement as he leaned forward and picked the curio up. Without a flicker of expression he examined it a moment and passed it along. It went from one to another. When it came to Mannering, he slipped it through his fingers as if it burned; no one could have helped noticing this. He was fairly pettish over it.

That, it struck me, was passing queer in a man of his worldly breadth. I hazarded a question, and was, even so, astonished at his vehemence.

"You've evidently seen it before, Mr. Mannering?" I said.

He looked up quickly. He smiled; people were looking. But it was quite different from the cordial one he had showed me at the door.

"Yes," he said, "I *have* seen it before!" Just like that!

Well, that ought to have been enough. It was, in a way. Something was wrong; Mannering didn't much care for his eccentric guest. But even with Furlong's warning ringing in my ears, I could scarcely figure out—

Del Quiche shifted in his seat and laughed again. He had been watching Mannering. His eyes were flaring like coals in black cavernous sockets.

"That figure," he purred, "I found under a twenty-foot rubbish pile in the ruins of a temple overgrown with palm-trees at the heart of Ixipacoomatl forest in Guate-

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mala. It is a priest of the Quiche nation."

IT WAS an invitation. Everyone dropped his diaphanous mantle of politeness and stared unreservedly at the speaker. Broad-shouldered and decidedly under height, the Costa Rican still sat slumped down in his chair, so that scarcely more than his head and shoulders were visible.

It was just that that had gotten us all by the throat. It might have been his identical image, the sneering, saturnine old face, with the hooked and hawklike nose, sloping back in a long slant to the top of the low forehead, the beady eyes, dark brown, but in some way greenly iridescent in the dull candlelight, the thin, red lips—

The fantastic spirit of the thing was overcoming me. It seemed as though the thirty-centuries-old red idol was speaking instead of his flesh-and-blood double, when the fellow, after a few seconds, went on in his satisfied, softly boasting way:

"The bulk of Costa Ricans of today," he explained, "are of European stock, but there is some infusion of ancient blood. However, this was so small that its characteristics disappeared centuries ago. Even in my own family, where the tribal name happened to be retained, there is nothing to distinguish the members from the ordinary people. Not for generations—never, so far as is known—"

He said, after that, considerably more about his family history that I didn't fully get, because my attention was yanked away to other things. For one, the affair had gotten to be decidedly embarrassing, not only that he was hogging the attention all to himself, but everyone, by this time, felt the undercurrent—something out of joint betwixt him and his hosts, and for pure cussedness, now that he had gotten the knife in, he was twisting it cleverly, and getting a pile of fun.

All up and down people were looking at each other sheepishly and making ineffectual efforts to break in. But he kept right on talking despite them all, keeping his flushed, eager face mostly turned square toward his timid little hostess at my elbow.

What Furlong had told me—the single word that he had breathed—came snapping back into my mind, whence, for the nonce, the novelty and fascination of the affair had driven it. I fancied that I began to see—yet if I accepted the idea at all, the irresistible conclusion was frankly lunatic and nothing else.

And then there was the other matter that I presently found myself puzzling over. The fellow's dialect. Not his English—that was flawless—nor his pronunciation, but rather the curiously soft, liquid intonation of his voice, something quite distinct from the normal aberrations of the Spanish palate bogging over Saxon dissonances.

"But you—"

It was Armitage again who had interrupted my cogitations and him as well.

Del Quiche settled still lower in his chair and his fingers fidgeted at the stem of his water goblet.

"I," he said, very softly and simply, "am a priest of Quiche!"

And then he lifted the glass to his lips and drained it as though he were drinking a toast.

"Eh?" blurted Armitage. "That idol's thousands of years old! Just because you happen to look like him—you're crazy! I—I beg your pardon!"

Del Quiche put down the glass.

"That is nothing," he murmured, waving his hand. "I am not offended, my young friend. It is difficult to comprehend—it is surprising, no?"

"It is—"

From the foot of the table Mannering glanced up, white-faced. It was evident that he was about to speak. But Miss Dane broke the wire ahead of him. Miss Dane was a faded and obviously impressionable spinster who had been following the trend of matters open-mouthed.

"Is it—do you mean you—you are reincarnated, *señor?*" she begged breathlessly.

To give the Costa Rican credit, he did smile genuinely at that. His answer was perhaps no more amazing than one should have expected after what had preceded. That is, the answer was out and out *non compos.*

"I should have scarcely called it by that name—yet perhaps I do not know, myself. Maybe it is as good as another. Let us say it is so. You are all amazed, but never mind. Amazement is good for one. I am high priest of the great temple; not the soul brought back in another person, but the bodily frame as well. I—"

"If you will excuse me," interrupted Furlong gravely from up the table, "I should like to ask you, before you continue, how can you be sure of that?"

His voice was as deferential as if he were a railroad director asking reasons of the president. He had obviously some

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reason for taking the lunatic seriously. But I was now positive that he had been entirely wrong in the suggestion he had made at the club.

"Your resemblance to the image is certainly striking, but it's quite as reasonable, isn't it, to say it's accidental as to make this extraordinary claim? One may very well take after his ancestors without—"

Del Quiche broke in by whirling in his seat and leaning forward to thrust his long brown finger out at Furlong.

"Two things," he snapped. "First, myself. You have traveled everywhere, they say, Señor Furlong; where in America have you found another man like me? Whether it is accidental, as you say, is of no consequence. My ancestors, as far back as any records go, had nothing like my features. Not in three centuries. Well, then, go back ten, twenty times as far—it is as I said.

"Second—a little story. I wonder if you would care for it? It is a simple tale of love—of a priest and of his sweetheart. It goes back, as I suggested, a long, long time. I will make it brief—very brief—and after it is finished you will look at —not at me, but at someone in the room—and say if I speak the truth."

In spite of its absurdity, there was something about the spirit of that challenge that made us all take breath. Furlong, not entirely to my surprise, passed it up. The fringe of faces staring at Del Quiche was pretty grave, and even with the touch of incredulity, curiously tense and hushed in the half light of the candles. Of course we were guessing who it was that the fellow was banking on for confirmation—and how.

When he began his yarn he spoke low and rapidly, as if to himself. His swarthy cheeks were splashed with sudden flushes. His eyes he kept mostly on the table, but when they rose, it was to the girlish face of Lucia Mannering, directly opposite.

In a flash, at that, it all came to me—who the other person was, and more than an inkling of what he was going to say. I had a thought of stopping him, but he had already commenced, and they were leaning forward to catch his words.

"As I have said, the high-priesthood was hereditary, and since I was my father's son, my youth was spent in study. My lessons were the picture writings of the gods that they had given down in early days, and the book of tribal laws. I learned them thoroughly—all but one that was kept secret. The laws forbade that it should be disclosed to me till the night of my wedding day.

"Ever since I had known that I was to be high priest I had looked forward to the hour when I would take my dear one to me and make her sharer in the honors of my office. For many years I had known who it would be. I had loved her since early childhood. Together we used to play about the flat terraces of the many-storied houses, running in and out of the open windows, chasing each other up and down the corridors, hiding in dark corners, or making mud statues of the great god Choclatlan by the riverside in the cool of the afternoon.

"Sometimes the drumming of the bronze bells for evening prayer found us there, and we would go up to the temple, where my father was standing with his arms wide to the declinig sun while he intoned the evening praise, and kneel before him, side by side.

"Eventually the day came when my father had died and I had met the old men, and with my hands on the great altar and my face toward the flaming sun, had sworn to obey all the laws as the leader of the people ought.

THE NEXT HOUR I summoned before me my sweetheart, and told her of my love and of the honor that would be hers. Afterward I seemed to remember that a look of terror had flitted over her face as I folded my arms about her, but at that moment I thought of nothing except our happiness and my pride when I showed her to the people at the wedding feast. Ah, after centuries I can see her now, slender, dark-haired, color like roses in her cheeks, ever smiling, even when she heard the words whose dreadful meaning she understood so much better than myself.

"But for her love's sake she kept silent, and in good time I found out for myself. I was told four hours after I had married her, on my wedding night. The old wise men of the tribe did it, standing round me in a fetid circle like carrion buzzards about a dying horse.

"Before they were half through I saw what they were going to say, and flew at them. I called them by all the curses under the million stars. If I had been armed I would have killed them all. I swore that I would kill myself.

"But to all they found an answer. It was the gods' will. Stronger than we were they, and wiser. What they had decreed

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it would be sacrilege for blind mortals to set at naught. As high priest I could not live my own life; I must serve the altars. And I had sworn. This and much more they poured into my ears, and in the end, for my people's sake, I yielded and I promised.

"They told me I had a year—a year of happiness, though it was not for that they granted it. It was to bring my heir into the world, and then—it is impossible for me to tell you what they said, but the high priest must live his life alone. A wife, a family, meant detachment. He was consecrated to the gods. Even his boy, after it was born, would be taken away and brought up by the old crones whom they appointed. It was the law.

"I did it; I kept my vow. After twelve months had passed and my sweet son was born, his mother and myself went out into the sunshine on the top of the great altar whose sides bear the many statues of gods and fighting men, before the concourse of all the people.

"Then I took from my girdle the sacrificial knife and faced about into the gleaming eye of the great sun-god himself. But at the very end I faltered, and it was she, with her brown hair a river down her back, and the orange-colored robe of sacrifice flowing about her shoulders, who warmed my cold hands in hers. That was while the sun maidens were dancing and singing their hymn of sacrifice, and when they had finished it was time. I—I have it here, the knife. Look at it—read the writing on the blade—"

There was a sort of universal gasp as the clatter of something on the table broke the monotone of his voice. Miss Dane shrieked faintly—she had gotten a lot more red blood than she had intended to ask for—and Armitage stiffened in his chair with a smothered oath. Mannering, white as a feather around the ears, peered over sharply, but no one moved till Furlong reached across and picked the thing up.

The knife was of bronze, the blade possibly six inches long, with a hilt of the same substance as the little idol—translucent, blood-red tourmaline, overwoven by a strangely patterned scroll work of pure gold. All over the blade, except the cutting edge, a mass of wonderfully engraved fine figures were intertwined in a sort of dance. After he had examined everything else, Furlong tested the sharpness on his thumb-nail. Then he looked interrogatively at the foreigner.

"That is, this is another curio? Did you find it in the same pile with the image? It's razor sharp."

"I do not know where I got it." The fellow's voice was suddenly dull; he appeared sulky and almost apathetic. "I have always had it. It is the knife with which, to please the gods, I killed my sweetheart, the dear mother of my son."

A spark of excitement began to glow in his eyes, growing rapidly to a flame.

"When she stripped off the outer robe that day and dropped it down on the flat altar top, with the sunshine making alabaster of her skin, the soft white skin I loved, and her brown hair a rippling waterfall against her back, she lifted up her lips. I kissed her, and then she lay down, without trembling, on the stone. I struck once—under the heart—and I killed her; *her—her!*"

He clattered to his feet, eyes bulging, face ashen, convulsed with sudden agony, both hands strained at arm's length across the table.

What I had been as a physician, for some time apprehending, had occurred. The fellow's mania, his wild obsession, had swept him into a mad frenzy. It was of course his host's wife, Lucia, that he was staring at and crying out to. The little thing, in a shiver of terror, had shrunk to me with a cry. Scarcely realizing, I put my arm about her shoulders.

"It is *you, you,* who were mine!" he was slavering imploringly. "You have been brought back to life with me; you are mine now! The first moment I saw you in the hotel with the man who is called your husband, I knew. I followed you; I shall always follow you—"

The room was in an uproar. The guests, all at once, began to stumble to their feet. Mannering charged up, overturning his chair, and raced round to the fellow's side. Armitage was there before him. Together they dragged him back, struggling, fighting, mouthing incoherently. It was an ugly sight. He kept holding out his hands to her and crying and imploring. Halfway to the door he became suddenly passive.

"May I say one word," he begged pantingly, "before the gentlemen put me out? I should like to make a simple statement. I trust I shall embarrass no one. It bears on my veracity—"

"Well," snapped Mannering, halting, "what is it?"

What the fellow did then upset all my convictions regarding his sanity. It seemed to me he drew himself up defiantly for a

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final stroke, as against a bitter enemy. If I had been Mannering, I would not have given him that moment's grace—not with my wife present.

"At the last moment," he murmured, "as I said, I struck at the heart. There would be a scar—"

A scream rang out. There was a soft clatter as Mannering's wife slipped through my grasp and crumpled on the floor. Across the table her husband's fist had crashed into the Costa Rican's chin. He smashed a chair as he went over backward.

HE WAS dead when they picked him up. I examined him at once and was able to say that the blow had had nothing to do with it; the fellow had had a bad heart trouble for years, and his aneurism had simply burst. Of course, if he had not been hit, he might have survived for months; and he might not.

As for Lucia, she had fainted, nothing more. Her husband and I carried her upstairs, and her maid got her undressed. After that, Mannering came to me as I was standing in the window with Furlong, and beckoned silently. He wanted me to examine her. It was after I had done so and assured him that all was well, that my friend and I climbed into his machine.

For quite a few minutes not a word was said. Then Furlong glanced at me as we passed under a light, and murmured:

"I guess I ought to apologize, Tommy; I really thought I had a sure enough case of atavism out there for you, and it turned out to be just a common paranoic—"

"I'm not so sure," I interrupted. "For a while tonight I thought so myself, but the fellow certainly *was* a flare-back—a reversion to type of the most rabid sort. It's perfectly true, what he said about there having been no one with his peculiar features alive during the last three or four or ten thousand years; if it isn't atavism for a man to jump back over all that time to get his looks, I don't know what is. Not only that, but his character, too; the man was a pagan and a savage."

"Of course," said Furlong slowly, "I know that. That was what I had in mind. But this business of the girl—of Mannering's wife—he was infatuated with her, and it drove him loony. I can swallow as much as the next man, but that story of the sacrifice and his identifying the girl—"

I knew Furlong was the pattern of discretion, and so, unprofessional as it was, I told him. He was in the thing pretty deep, too.

"Furlong," I said, "that's just what any sane man would say but facts are funny."

"Why—what do you mean?" He whirled.

I felt like whispering when I said the words: Perhaps I did. Lucia's husband had shown me himself, with her permission. It seemed as though they wanted someone besides themselves to know it.

There was a lurid, heavy weal, possibly an inch from end to end, which looked more like a birthmark than a scar. She said it had been there all her life. It ran crosswise of her slender body, and was just where a knife-thrust at her heart would enter.

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From Time's

CHAPTER I

BEYOND THE BIG SLIDE

"I SEE," said the man sitting opposite me in the smoker of the New Orleans Flyer, "that they're going gunning after some prehistoric stuff down in Patagonia. What do you call the things—dinosaurs, isn't it, or some such jawbreaker? Guess they baptized those cattle

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Dawn

By B. Wallis

Strange, unrecognizable creatures, bred of a freak of Evolution, they swarmed in their hidden lair and waited with preternatural cunning to close in upon their victim. . . . How could he outwit them, and win through to warn the world?

according to their mileage. Well, I hope they get them—bust them up with T.N.T. Those brutes belong to a million years ago, and let them stay there."

Aroused out of my travel reverie—the usual result of watching endless miles of monotonous landscape go sliding by—I turned to the speaker. My gaze rested on a thin, sinewy—one instinctively knew there were steel springs built into those long sinews—individual, rather above the

"His gun barrel bit into them and flung their beastly carcasses to each side . . ."

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average stature. For the rest, I merely noted sharp features and cold grey eyes.

On his knee lay a paper, a large sprawling Sunday edition, and I caught a glimpse of a huge pictorial monster—drafted in a liberal mood—thereon. There had recently occurred one of those epidemic eruptions of public interest in the primordial which every now and again ravage the country—generously assisted by strictly inaccurate reports of untraceable explorers who were shortly setting forth upon expeditions to track and exterminate some prehistoric survival. Why these poor lonely phantoms should arouse the degree of animus his tone conveyed aroused in me a faint curiosity.

"Quite true," said I, "but you don't take that stuff seriously, do you? You know it's a regular stock line in the trade—reading matter and pictures all ready set up on the shelf, due about twice a year, or as often as the patient can stand them."

"I dare say. These writing guys—what do they know?" he replied slowly and with a tinge of irritation. "This humming bird here may be a fairy tale, but that don't alter the fact that I surely do know some of these unholy brutes are using this old globe yet, blast them! If I was an oil king, I'd have men spending all their days rooting them up and making fertilizer of their dirty carcasses."

I stared at him with considerable interest. His sincerity and resentment were transparently genuine, and yet there was no external indication of mental derangement. I was curious, though of course incredulous. His astounding assertion had the effect of a tonic upon my travel-jaded system.

"Isn't that rather an odd statement?" I asked thoughtfully. "You know, that—apart from Sunday editions, of course—no living man has ever set eyes on one, that is, so far as I am aware. And yet I suppose you have some grounds for believing they exist?"

"Believe! I don't believe—I know. At least if they didn't belong away back before Adam, where did they come from? That's what I want to know. Though I've chased up all kinds of books and museums, I've never come across a track of them. But I guess a raft of twisted cantankerous things crawled around in those days and never left no signs for the highbrows to work on."

"What kind of things were they? Wings, teeth, claws—reptile, bird or what?" I asked with due gravity.

"Wings? No—that sort don't grow wings." He gave a derisive cackle. "Teeth? Well, I'm darned if I know, though they had some sort of contraption that could bite a hole out of a boiler plate. Yes, they had claws all right—great big black hooks about two inches long. Pah! It makes me sick to think of the brutes." He stopped abruptly and a slight but undeniable shiver shot through his frame.

"Look here—what you've told me sounds interesting. Why not spin the yarn? It seems as if there's a good story somewhere. I guess you're not getting off yet?" I queried hopefully. Somehow that kind of man usually goes as far as transportation will carry him—and then some.

"Me! No, sir, I'm going right through. Thanks, don't mind if I do," he replied. "It was like this. Some years ago—about five—I was down in Yucatan—how I got there doesn't matter—poking around in the hills with a man called Joe. That wasn't his name. It was some high-toned Portuguese turnout, but I just called him Joe—and a better partner I never wish to run into. White all the way through. There was just our two selves and a couple of burros packing the outfit, and we were away back. We weren't heading anywhere in particular, but mostly we hit north, following up the creeks and getting higher up all the time.

"I GUESS we were the first whites up there. Never a sign of a human, not so much as an Indian trail. But we didn't raise any kick about this, for Indians back there don't cotton to strangers none. It seemed like as if we had broken into another planet; just the great hills, cactus and sagebrush, and our little outfit wandering silently along. As I said, we had got high up, been out over a month crawling around and up those hills, half the time having to go back on our steps for some big hunk of a rock which needed wings to get over.

"Hard going often enough, but we did not worry; had plenty of grub, and no rush to get anywhere. It was great. The days were scorchers, but the nights were cool so that you could curl up in the blankets and stay there till the sun showed. Water? Well, that was the trouble. We never dared get many days from a creek, though I don't know we ever really wanted to.

"We panned right along, but never run up against anything to write home about until one day in a fair-sized creek the line

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of yellow showed up in the pan so you could see it. Not pay, you understand, maybe not a cent there, but the stuff wasn't the kind that floats. Anyway, it looked good to us. We kept right on up that creek for a whole day.

"At supper time I guess there was three cents to the pan, and the stuff was starting to take an edge on it. You could hear it drop—that tinkle sounds good. I tell you, we got pretty well worked up over it, and next morning we didn't oversleep none. We had eaten our bacon and flapjacks before the sun got into his stride. The showings got better right along, and it was all in the main stream. The side creeks had nothing. Yet it was all fine—no coarse at all. We couldn't figure it out, for the grade was getting pretty stiff, and the creek was swift enough to run down coarser stuff than this, and there must be some heavy gold with all this amount of fine showing up.

"By noon the hills had closed in on us and bluffs at times were running right up from the water. After a snack, we pushed on, and around a bend we suddenly found ourselves in a real canyon, just the creek and a narrow strip of beach—sometimes on one side and sometimes no beach, only great bluffs dropping right down to the water. But the creek bed held fairly clean so that we were able to keep the burros to it.

"At that time of day this big gash in the hills was a real honest-to-goodness furnace; the blazing sun shooting right square down into it so that the rocks were red hot, and not a breath of air either. With all those turns and twists in that canyon I guess the air hadn't changed any since the ark bumped ashore. If it hadn't been for that creek we could never have won through. As it was, we had to lie full stretch flat in the water every few minutes or we should have dried up like mummies.

"It was tough going, but when the yellow is rooted in your eye—maybe you know how it is yourself?"

I nodded; to my sorrow, I did.

"The burros stumbled along somehow, gasping and grunting. Poor brutes, they wanted to lay down in the water themselves as bad as we did, but we argued them out of the notion. The hills kept on closing in and shooting up higher all the time until at last we were walking all the time in the creek, which wasn't over twenty feet across any place and sometimes half that. In spots the walls leaned over and big slabs of rock stuck out, almost touching the other side like a roof. Then we could get a few minutes in the shadow, though the air was stifling as ever.

"We took a pan now and again, and found each time the values were toting away up, though the stuff was still of the same grade. There was something unusual ahead; that was a certainty, and we struggled on in a fever to see what it was.

"IT MUST have been about two miles after we struck the canyon that we hit the big water slide. It was a slant of smooth rock under a great overhanging ledge which roofed the water in so it looked like the creek was coming from the inside of the hills. This slide was steep, but we could navigate it, though the burros had to be yanked up by main force. Whether it was the gloom or the sliding water, or just a clear case of instinct warning them, I don't know; but anyway they backed, squealed, and lashed out for all they were worth, and we had a tough job getting them through. That tunnel ran for about a hundred feet, and as it had a sharp turn at the top the going was middling gloomy.

"Then all at once we were out in the

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blazing sun again, for as we turned the corner the ledge narrowed back to the side wall and the open sky showed a few yards ahead. The canyon was opening out into a gulch, the beach was on each side again, and the bluffs were setting farther back. Away ahead there was an open gap of sky where the gorge made a big V against the skyline. It looked as if everything came to an end, as the grade was so steep we couldn't see what lay beyond.

"But those burros could smell farther than we; they snuffed the air a little, and then there was no holding them back. They just made a bee line for the top, and we after them. At the top we stopped dead—the sight took our breath away for a moment.

"To us—scorched to the marrow, as it were—it looked for all the world like a piece cut out of heaven. Stretched in front of us lay a tidy sized bit of meadow land flat as a board for maybe a mile each way and covered with tall waving grass, the creek cutting through the center like a silver thread. Beyond, the ground sloped up to the bluffs and hills which closed the whole spot in, just like the rim of a deep saucer. The size from rim to rim might have been three or four miles. Between the grass land and the rim lay a belt of green bush looking as pretty as a frame.

"It was enough to bring water to your eyes to clap them on such a spot after the grilling we had been through. How this great little place happened to be sitting up there I don't rightly know, though I have a strongish conviction that it was nothing but an old volcano crater which had got filled up and grown over, and, being shaped like a cup, kept always moist. It looked that way to me.

"It didn't take us more than a minute to take note of something else, the sight of which wiped everything else clean out of our heads. That was that a ridge of bedrock ran clean across the creek just where the top of the rise from the canyon came and the meadow started in. That ridge stood out like a reef clean across the creek—a thick band of basalt shoved up through the country rock—making a dam no water could wear down.

"Any man knowing gold from gum could see right off what it meant—nothing but a natural sluice box which would catch everything except the fine colors we had been panning, which would get over in flood time.

"Jerusalem! My heart skipped a beat as I caught on. We had drawn a royal flush, sure enough. Joe and I didn't say a word. We had no time for chewing the rag like they do in books. Take the talk stuff out of a book, and you might have two pipe lights left. Throwing the packs off the burros, which had started in to clean that meadow up, we got to work at once. The first pan was enough. There must have been a dollar in it—pretty stuff, like bird seed, that was from the top of the dirt above the water line.

"After that for two weeks, as well as I can figure it—we didn't worry much about dates up there, for June or January was all one to us—from sunup to sundown were the working hours, and we ate and slept because we had to, though we reckoned nature had built us that way just in spite. It was enough to make any one feel that way, for every shovel we sent down the values jumped a notch until it ran around five dollars to the pan, which is some gold—sort of thing every man in the hills dreams of, but never gets near.

"Then one night, smoking a last pipe round the fire, a glimmer of reason was born in my gold-doped brain, and it gave me a start.

"'Look here, Joe, how much have we got now?' I asked, nodding at the canvas sacks in the tent.

"'I dunno,' says he. 'Maybe—well, a whale of a pile. In a little we'll have to sleep outside the tent.'

"'We'll stop right here and think around that. How much do you reckon those burros can tote besides our truck?' said I slowly.

"'About— What are you driving at?' He dried up as he caught on.

"'There's nothing for it. We've got to stop right now,' said I severely, 'and get some science into our navigation. It's no manner of use working our fool heads off just to move the stuff a few feet from where it lays now in the dirt. The big idea is, what are we going to do with it—how are we going to get outside? You don't figure on staying here all our days, I guess, and sitting on it like a hen on eggs, do you?'

"Joe and I sat up late that night and fought the thing to a finish. I hated to quit just as bad as he did, but I had some sense left, and when we turned in he had, too. We had it all doped out. We'd pack all the burros could stand for, cache the rest, cover up our work as well as we could, and hit the home trail, keeping so sharp an eye on the lay of the land that we'd get back again if we were struck blind.

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"Once we'd hit the coast we'd ship higher up and on to Galveston, dump the stuff in a bank and refit in style, though without shouting about it. We meant to go in again from farther south; it would be longer, yet a heap safer. We didn't want any guys laying awake nights figuring what the big idea was that we were hiking back again so sudden. It might take some doing, but with such a stake waiting we'd signpost the country so that to us it would be just the same as a state road.

"As I have said, we hated to quit; but what was the good of hanging on? We had more than we could handle now, and we hadn't made more than a pinprick in the dirt yet. The sooner we pulled out, the better, but we agreed that first we'd stake out the whole valley—not that stakes are much better than firewood in those parts. Anyway, I felt sort of curious to see what the other side of the valley was like, for we'd never been more than a couple of hundred feet away from the tent since we struck that first pan.

"THE next morning we hit out good and early, heading up to the far end of the valley. For about a half mile the going was good—open ground, with tall grass and clumps of low bushes. After that the bush got thick, and pretty soon we had our work cut out to get through the stuff—a tangle of creepers and trailers like a web tying up the scrub in a bughouse weaving of its own.

"Here and there we hit spots where the sun shot through and flowers of all sizes and colors were splashed around. Some of them looked like orchids to me, yet somehow they were flowers of a kind I had never seen before, something queer about them; they were the oddest shapes and had blotches and bands of color that would hold up a blind man. The trees, too, were strange to me—short and thick-stemmed, with bark like fish scales.

"It struck me as funny, too, that there was never a sign of life, not even a snake, and it came suddenly on me that since we had struck this valley, except for a few small birds around the creek, we had never set eyes on a living thing. A green spot like this should have been jumping with life, but being gold crazy we hadn't taken note of it. Once Joe stopped and stared around as though listening for something. It was just what I had been feeling like.

"We pushed on, and after a bit the bush got thinning out so that one could get around without using an auger. The ground started to swing up and rocks were cropping out, so we knew that we must be nearing the end of the valley. A little more and we found ourselves out in the open.

"A very different end was this. In front of us lay a stretch of rocks, maybe a couple of hundred yards across and twice that in width. This stretch was almost level, being the top of a bench, the slope of which we had been climbing the last few minutes in the bush. Running right down to the neck of this rock pile were great spurs from the hills, here and there broken off into ragged bluffs and gashed by gullies. It was out of a large one at the very end of this neck that the creek was tumbling. Even there the creek was quite a husky flow, for these dried-up old bones of hills, and came jumping down in great style to this mess of rocks where it widened out into a chain of pools between banks not two feet high.

"Joe and I took it all in, foot by foot, summing up the layout in our heads. Then we looked at each other strangely. We'd both got to the same answer, and that was one which set my heart pumping away on a mad gallop, and my throat went dry and stiff.

"'Joe, you got it?' said I huskily.

"'Good—*Madre de Dios!*' he muttered, staring around in a dazed sort of way as his lips kept on working. Then suddenly he started to run toward the creek. I knew what had got him, just as it had got me, though being raised in a superstitious country it had got into his head worse than into mine—just like booze, it hits them harder and quicker than us northern guys.

"You see what we had hit was this, the water coming rushing down that gully was held up and slowed down quite a piece when it struck this level stretch with its deep pools. Moreover, in flood time it was a sure thing that the water would sweep over the whole rock pile. The thing just shouted at you. It was a natural sluice box on a large scale and a perfect one. What we had been bursting our fool backs over down below was only just the small seed which got washed over in the floods!

"This was the real home of the stuff and what that meant sent the blood singing through my head as I followed Joe, though not trying to fly as he was. I reckoned the metal had waited here a few thousand years and might hang on a few minutes longer.

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"I saw Joe stop near the creek and stoop to turn a rock over. Then he was jumping back as though a stick of powder had helped him along and a high-powered yell came whizzing by. I didn't like that noise one little bit; it put me in mind somehow of tarantulas and things that crawl.

"'Hullo, Joe!' I yelled back. 'What's the trouble? Got bitten?'

"I was in a sweat, for any kind of a bite in that land means trouble and permanganate, just as sure and as quick as you can get them. Like fools we had left the dope in camp. I guess since we struck that first pan we got a bit dippy in the head and hardly worried about anything, unless it was colored yellow. Joe made no answer, but picking up a rock let fly at the place he had jumped away from. I was tearing up. I heard the rock strike and saw the pieces fly up like a shell bursting—Joe was a very strong built man and had arms like a gorilla. Mixed up with the splinters was a red and yellow kind of paint, at least it looked that way.

CHAPTER II

THE THINGS

"'WHAT was it? Did it get you?' I cried as I closed up, pulling a shell out of my pocket, meaning to draw the powder to touch off in the wound.

"'Bill, I ain't bitten, but did you ever see that sort of critter before? I never seen the mate of that thing. I don't like him, he's one damn bad fellow, make me feel sick all over.' Joe pointed to something dark on the ground.

"I stared at the dirty looking dark mess he was pointing at. And what I saw made me feel sick all over, too. I don't know exactly why, for there wasn't much to botanize over, just a smashed, tangled mass of pulpy stuff, all red and yellow with what looked like blood oozing over it. A thick, heavy, sickening liquid, it was, and it seemed to crawl over the black, hairy smash it came out of.

"About the size of a big cat, this beastly thing was, and had patches of coarse, dull black hair on it. Joe had made such a mess of it that I couldn't see if this was fur of a kind or not. His rock must have hit the thing clean in the middle so that the head was the only thing one could be certain of and that was partly pulped.

"What I could figure out of it was the strangest puzzle and the most vicious looking headpiece I had ever clapped eyes on. Seemed as if it was covered with a band of smooth, dirty black parchment, a broad, thick head, something the shape of a bulldog's. And the mouth had quite a lot of that look about it, being a wide, loose-lipped gash without shape or decency—not firm and clean like a bulldog's—thick, blubbery folds of flesh, and the lips hung around the mouth, and where they had curled back, as though snarling, the inside of them was slimy and colored a nasty greeny-yellow.

"If it had teeth I couldn't see them. But there was on each side, hanging from the upper jaw, a straight, flat, hornlike tusk, maybe two inches long, and ending in a sharp needle point. Its eyes, though, were the strangest part of it. Sittings up on stalks they were, like round buttons on the end of rubber tubes—something after a lobster, but these stalks were at least three inches long and thick as a carpenter's pencil and had a covering of the same coarse black hair that was all over the thing.

"As for the rest, I didn't notice anything in particular—whether it had a nose or ears I don't know. I was too much taken up staring at that nightmare of a mouth, it was the most evil looking thing I had ever set eyes on. It gave one the notion that it had come, or most likely been kicked, out of hell about a million years ago and was just waiting here to take it out of every living thing it could get hold of. My nerve used to be middling tough, but that brute sent a cold chill chasing down my spine.

"'Jersusalem! What kind of a bird is that?' said I slowly. 'Is it insect, reptile, or the spewings of hell, or just a straight dream without the booze?'

"'It come from hell all right, I think,' replied Joe quite serious. 'He been asleep here, I guess, or he get me sure, but this time I get him. I think we better hit back pronto! This a bad place, much evil things stop here, very bad, it bring bad fortune. I feel it inside me very strong. Let us go back, and without noise.'

"Now I felt pretty much the same way myself. You know how it is up in the hills; a man kind of gets next to a raft of stuff he don't see and couldn't explain, but he just knows are right there. But while he had been talking my eye had been on the hole where he had turned over a rock as he jumped back. And what lay there was a chunk, the size of a half dollar, of yellow gold! That settled me.

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"'Look there! See that, Joe?' I yelled, dropping on my knees beside that slug, every other thought washed clean out of my head. In a tick it was lying in my hat and I was scratching in the dirt. Well, sir, believe it or not, in a few minutes I had half a dozen other pieces laying along with the big fellow, real slugs, none of them under half an ounce. I guess there was close around a hundred dollars in the old hat. And the dirt was dripping with stuff the size of a fat wheat kernel and up!

"I held up the hat to Joe; I couldn't get a word out. Then I see he wasn't taking no notice, just got his eyes glued on the bluffs ahead. A sudden spurt of anger came over me.

"'What's the matter with you? Thinking of that pretty bird you smashed? Don't worry no more over him. You look at this.' I shoved the hat into his hand. For a moment he stared at it as though he held a lump of mud in his hand. Then he woke up.

"'We sure catch it big this time! We strike the mother of all the gold in the world, eh?' said he in a hoarse whisper. Gold like that makes men whisper; it's the smaller stuff they make the big noise over.

"'That's the idea, mother of all the gold in the world.' I went over his words—these Latin guys sure know how to use words right. 'Why, the dirt is solid with it! Klondike is a joke to this. I guess right now we're the richest guys in the whole little world.'

"I was meandering on, sort of wound-up and happy, when suddenly Joe brought me plunk down on the earth again.

"'That's all right—maybe, but we ain't out of this yet. You look at that! I don't like it! Much evil here. I feel it in the bones. These things, what are they? Hey?' Joe's voice was very troubled and strange.

"I straightened up and followed his pointing finger. Somehow my tap of joy was turned off right then. For about two hundred feet from us to one side, a ridge of the hill shoved its nose out and dropped off short with a sheer bluff, maybe fifty feet high. Near the top the face was broken up and ledges cropped out like steps. On one of these steps a little crowd of what looked like long-haired black cats crouched and seemed to be watching us.

"I knew those brutes were just some kind of vermin I hadn't hit up against before, but, for all that it was a blazing furnace where we stood, a block of ice seemed to be clapped on my spine. There was something horrible in that little bunch—seemed to flow out of them like a magnetic current. The air was so clear up in those parts one could pick out even the long, coarse black hair which straggled over their dark, filthy hides, and it was quite plain to see that their beastly eye stalks were fixed on us—turn them right over, they could, like a piece of rubber pipe.

"THERE we stood, Joe and I and the vermin staring at each other. Then one of them rose on its jointed legs and craned its head over the edge of the rock, a slow, calculated movement, just as a man might take a squint at some game he had got cornered. That stretched Joe's nerve a bit too tight. Snapping out a curse he caught up his rifle which he had dropped when I handed him the hat of nuggets. Joe was a dead shot, one of those men who just can't miss, and the rifle was a magazine carbine. Splash! went number one, its carcass spattering the ledge of quartz behind with blotches as it burst into a red and black colored spray. Ditto number two, number three, and to the end of the magazine—six rounds. It was curious the way their bodies seemed to burst into a squash, like an overripe plum. By this time the survivors of the wicked bunch were scooting around corners, and losing no time over it, either, and they could go some, too. They didn't wait to reason about it, they just up and beat it.

"'That'll learn them some!' said Joe viciously as the last shell sprayed the white quartz with another black vermin. 'They can't look at me that way and not get hurt. Those—they were planning some frame-up, I know, sure as I stand here, and mean not to stand here much more, either. What in hell do you make of them, Bill?'

"'I don't make nothing out of them, Joe, unless it's something that didn't get drowned in the flood. The Bible says that the world had got middling low down in them days. Maybe this is a bit of the old original cussedness left over,' I said, but I wasn't all joking either; the brutes had got my number and shook my nerve up more than a bit.

"'I think we better go out of this, Bill. Some day we come back here, big outfit and sluice this dirt. Can't do nothing now, anyway, too much to pack already. What you say, up stakes and pull out?' As he spoke he kept his eyes steady on the red-splotched bluff. What he said was just plain common sense, but to men like us—well, who ever heard of quitting a

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miner's dream like this without giving it the once-over, if nothing more?

"'Joe, I don't like this blasted hole any more than you do, but for all that it's the biggest thing in its line this old world has ever seen and you and me are going to round up the crop. Not now, you're right. But I'm going to have a look at the orchard before we beat it. You squat down and keep your eyes peeled while I snoop around.'

"This suited Joe and he sat on a rock with his gun across his knee. For myself I wasted no time. I turned on that stretch of rocks like a mountain lion on a lamb. In a flash I had a nest of bowlders out of their sockets and was down on my knees combing the smooth hollows of gravel over. It was a rough, hurried raking, but what I salvaged staggered me—a score of slugs, from a dollar piece up to a two-ounce lump. Tumbling these into a sugar sack I had in my pocket I took a pan of dirt to the clear and quickly slopped it through. About half a tea cup was left, just gold—nothing but gold! All of it was coarse, there wasn't a color under a ten-cent piece and a raft of it was the size of small corn. In about five minutes I had taken in well over three hundred dollars from a patch not four feet square, and at that only the scratching of the top dirt.

"I couldn't say a word or do a thing. I just stood gaping at that yellow pile. It was impossible! The thing was too vast; never in the world had such a placer been dreamed of. For a moment it came on me that we had both suddenly gone bughouse. Shaking, I trickled the stuff in my fingers. The feel of it set me at rest. It was true, in that forsaken spot we stood there the richest men in the world! Not Morgan or Rockefeller had anything on us. Their little piles would be lost in the shadow of ours.

"'Joe,' I said hoarsely; 'we own the world! Take hold of it man, and tell me I'm not dreaming—not dead—feel it, man, and say what is in that bag! Is it sure enough gold? I don't trust my eyes no more.'

"I shoved the bag into his hand and for the first time he took notice of what I had got, and a flash of wonder came into his eyes. Then in the same second it was gone and the big bag fell from his hand, or would have, had I not caught it.

"'What the devil are you about?' said I, mad as a girl when her fellow looks at another skirt. For answer he swung his rifle up, and following that barrel with my eye, I, too, forgot what was in my hand.

"Away up the ravine in which the creek lay it looked like there was an earthquake going on. The ground up there was rising and falling much as a choppy sea rushing in on a wind-driven tide. Yet it wasn't the solid ground which was jumping around, it seemed more as if a thick layer of mud or black muck of some sort had got loosed from somewhere and was bearing down on us in a rush, covering up everything as it boiled along. I stared for a second, not catching on. Then I got it and stopped living for another few seconds—I'm dead sure my heart never gave a beat for that time.

"I was scared stiff as a mummy, for that black muck was nothing but a living torrent of vermin, a seething mass of scrambling, sliding, leaping filth. There must have been thousands of them; they covered the whole floor of the gully, except in the center where the creek ran, and right away up the sides, the steep slopes and bluffs were black with them, all racing in a mad, heaving torrent down upon us.

"'Jerusalem! They're coming for us! We're dead meat for sure,' I muttered hoarsely. An ear-splitting crack shattered the still air. Joe was firing. That woke me up.

"'Don't stop to shoot, you fool! Beat it, quick! We can't do nothing here; that bunch mean business. Scoot for your life, Joe!' I yelled at him as I made a beeline back the way we came.

"Run! I never ran that way before, and only once since, as I'll tell you of later. I could hear Joe coming crashing after me as I slid into the bushes. I was scared, every inch of me was dripping scare, there's no use to deny it; I was stampeded. The sight of that black, unholy swarm of great vermin had got right into my marrow and chased every bit of human pride out of me.

"Joe, I guess, was feeling about the same. How long we were crashing through that bush I don't know, for the first thing I really took note of was that we couldn't go no further at the rate we had done the first lap. A whole raft of fallen junk was stopping the way; some freshet had eaten into the bank here and made a mess of it. This stop brought some little sense back to me.

"'DO you see anything Joe? said I, panting, as I stared around. But not a leaf was shaking in that wall of jungle, and not a whisper of sound cut

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the awful stillness which closed us in; even the creek, though I knew it to be not many hundred feet away, might have been frozen for all the sound that came through that deadening blanket of tangled bush.

"The funny thing was that this silence had no soothing effect on our ragged nerves; it was rather the other way round. I had a distinct feeling that this was only some covering in league with those horrors which at that very moment were creeping up on us. I guess it was only high-keyed suspense playing jazz on shot-up gray matter. For a moment we stood listening; then a fit of anger came over me.

"'What are you standing there for? Can't you do something, blast you! We'll be caught in a trap here. Let's get on, out to the open, where we can see what's coming. Beat it for the creek and follow that down.'

"I lowered my voice as I said this, as though I was scared that something might hear and understand what I was saying, when the noise we made going through that dead place was much the same as a bunch of cattle on the range.

"Well, we got down to the creek and took to the water right away, and stayed with it until we got out into the open meadow about two miles lower down. In spots the water was deep, so that we had to hang on to bushes hanging from the banks and work our way along, but it was easy going compared to the bush.

"I tell you that camp of ours looked mighty good to us, so peaceful and homelike it didn't seem possible that such unnatural horrors could be allowed to live in the same world with it. If it hadn't been for the sugar sack of slugs I had in my shirt—the pan I had dropped up there when we beat it out—I reckon we might have judged the whole thing to be some kind of a bad dream, or a sudden spasm of brainstorm. But the sight and heft of those yellow boys didn't leave no room for stalling round the plain facts. There couldn't be a shadow of doubt but what we had run up against some unknown terrible sort of vermin, deadly and numerous, and it was only by a hair that they hadn't gathered us in.

"Sitting by the fire—we kept a big one going all night—after supper we argued all round those blasted things, and didn't savvy them a bit more when we got through; they were there, and that was all there was to it. Except we agreed that the sooner we beat it out of this murder nest the healthier for us. Now they knew we were here they'd get us sooner or later for sure; it was plain they had the wicked brain of an ant for the united and immediate killing of every living thing they set their beastly eyes on—though how they came to pass us over until now was a miracle. I suppose it just happened they hadn't been snooping around this end of the valley, and we, never moving from the spot, luck had dealt us the odd chance.

"'Those bones—the owners all died sudden?' said Joe abruptly.

"I stared at him and an icy chill drew up alongside of me and laid its deathly hands on my marrow. For a moment I didn't quite see to what those words were leading but there was something in me which shivered and sniveled without any help from my brain machine. I had clean forgotten a raft of bleached, sun-cracked bones we had tramped over in the stretch between the valley and the roofed-in strip of canyon.

"In this stretch, particularly at the lower end, there lay the bones of at least a dozen animals as I roughly reckoned at the time. Most of them, I guess, were deer, but a couple of piles were sure mountain lion, and I remember wondering, as I hit it up after those burros, how they had come to hand in their checks so sociable. But what we found on the top had wiped everything else clean out of our heads. Now this came back to us and we stared at each other with the blank stare of men who have had a bad jolt, but don't quite know where it came from.

"'Bones, what about them? They needn't worry us,' said I uneasily. 'What you got in your head? They had to die somewhere, I guess—just happened they wandered up here when they got old and sick. That's all there's to that.'

"But I knew I was lying; kind of lying a guy does when he's too bad scared to look at the truth.

"'They didn't come to die; they'd be up here where the feed is if they was sick. What made them sick all in bunch like that was not many months back, for the bones would have pull out with the last freshet. They come since then. Bill, you know what finish them same as I do,' Joe said almost in a whisper, and I could see his eyes peering around in the shadows thrown by the fire.

"I didn't say a word; I knew he was right. There couldn't be no other meaning to those bones. That bottle end of the canyon was as neat a trap as could be found. Anything scared would stampede

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down that canyon, and the rest was just a matter of numbers to pull them down.

"But all this argued middling high brain power, and such crowds of them that even a racing deer or raging lion was only pie to these vermin. It came to me that we were in a worse mixup than I had thought. If these filthy rakings of hell had brains enough to figure this thing out, then they would sure lay for us in the same way.

"Joe and me never turned in that night; we just lay and smoked, kept the fire going and a sharp lookout. We were scared—scared so bad that we hadn't much to say, and there was no arguing over the etiquette of our going. We'd just pull up stakes and quit the minute there was light enough to hike, leaving the whole works as they lay, only packing out as much dough as the burros could take easy.

"All thought of covering up our workings was knocked on the head; all we thought about was making our get-away quick. We knew there was trouble rushing to us, but we reckoned there was a fair show of beating them to it. We didn't dare to think what it meant if we failed. Of course we were coming back, but then we'd be fixed to talk back strong talk to the murdering scum.

CHAPTER III

THE START AT DAWN

"AS the stars faded out we had swallowed our coffee and flapjacks, hitched the packs on the burros — mostly gold, three hundred pounds weight there was—and were ready to make a start—which we did before the gray light had chased the shadows from the hills. I was leading with Pete, the biggest and boss burro, while Joe followed with Tim, who would go anywhere so long as he could see Pete ahead of him—he had a great admiration for Pete and left him to do all the brain work.

"I don't say that for a moment we didn't feel sore at being rushed out of it like this, the sort of feeling a newly married man might have when his boss tells him to take the night train and not get off it for a couple of days. It seemed as if all the pikers in the world must be somewhere around watching us pull out, and strings of miners were sure tearing up to this find of ours. That's the way we felt over it. When you can only see gold it gets your reason all twisted up.

"The big gully which led down looked as quiet and peaceful as only the high hills in the gray of dying night can look. But it was not more than fifty feet down that we got the first hint all was not so peaceful as it looked. For right there, without any talk about it, Pete stopped dead, and lifting his head up, smelt the air in a very thorough sort of fashion, as though he wanted to assay it for all sorts of rare and doubtful smells. Meanwhile his eyes, showing the whites, were boring into that gully as if he had suddenly thought of something he had dropped and meant to find it or bust.

"'Hi, you Pete! What's hit you, you old fool?' said I, getting mad and quite a bit startled as I yanked at his halter. But Pete wasn't open to reason—short of a ship's capstan—and just set his feet firmer in the rubble so that he could brace himself back. What a burro doesn't know about the theory of mechanics isn't of any use to science.

"'Pete, quit that stuff. I don't take to this gully any more than what you do, but we got to go through with it, old man, so just forget it,' said I earnestly. It's queer how a man gets to treat his burro like a partner, and it's a fact, a good burro is a good partner though awful set on his own idea.

"Now, Pete wasn't a bad sort and in general was inclined to be an obliging cuss, even when he couldn't see any sense in your ideas. But this time there was no moving him, short of yanking his neck off, and I didn't feel like being harsh with him, as I was nothing but a bunch of nerves myself and reckoned that he most likely knew a lot more than I did—which didn't cheer me up any.

"It certainly did look gloomy down the great gash. From where we stood the sides rose rapidly higher and steeper until a bit lower down they slid into the towering walls of the canyon. The roofed-in stretch, however, though only a short distance further down, was not in view, for a big beak of rock sticking out from one side about a hundred feet ahead, screened the black tunnel from us.

"'Joe, how does this look to you?' said I, and my voice was lowered almost to a whisper.

"'There's sure something below us,' he replied, and his voice was no louder than mine. 'I can't see nothing around—how did they come so quick down here? I think this is where we turn right back, what you say, Bill? I cannot face these

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devils in this trap. In the open—yes—there is a chance, maybe? But here in this trap—they got this fixed—they wipe us out quick. We hit it back, Bill, maybe some other way out.'

"He was scared right through, and I guess there wasn't a hair between us, far as that went. Only it happened I had some of the old pig-headed Anglo-Saxon blood in me, and that liquid drives a man on in the course he started out from port in—seems as if he can't get away from it—he's just got to carry on.

"So, now, though every cell in me squealed aloud to beat it back to the open as quick as legs could carry me and get away from the horror waiting down below, even if it was only delaying it for an hour—yet I could not do it. Something drove me on.

"'Oh, we can't stand here all day. You hold those brutes, Joe, and I'll go ahead a bit and see what's worrying them. Lord have mercy on them if they're fooling us; I'll skin them alive. If you hear a shot, beat it quick, I'll be right behind you.'

"So saying, I threw the halters to Joe and hiked down the gully with the safety off my gun. I heard him say something, but what I didn't catch. With my eyes poking every crevice and ledge I reached the big beak of rock sticking out, and passed around it. Everything seemed quiet enough and never a sound came to my listening ears, though I stopped here a moment before going into what was now the real canyon, where the walls went towering up on each side with deep, jagged rifts here and there splitting them up into all sort of strange shapes.

"The cold grip of fear never lifted off my spine, and the sense of things waiting for me, and watching every step, was just as certain in my bones as the eye of what it sees. I heard a scientific highbrow once say that the eye is only a crowd of specialized cells, and it seems to me that we have a lot more specialized cells than what we know of in us; likely these feel things that our eyes don't notice, or perhaps our brains don't pick up.

"Anyway, I just knew those things were down there. From here, I was out of sight of Joe, which fact squeezed the last drop of comfort out of my shaken nerves. It dripped off me and evaporated. What was left was simply quivering jelly that once had been nerves. I hadn't even spunk enough to turn back. All I could do was to go on the way my legs had been started. In a sort of a trance, I stumbled on until I reached the big pool in front of the tunnel. This was maybe about twenty feet each way and its lower end was roofed over by the hanging ledge. It was fairly deep in the center. Coming up, we had splashed, half swimming, through it at the side.

"Like a machine run up against a snag, I stopped. Here, the gloom was deeper than at any part of the canyon; the walls were wild precipices of ragged black rock running straight up for hundreds of feet, and the sky on top was only a strip of deep blue ribbon. It seemed to be miles away. Here, standing at the edge of this dark, silent pool I knew I had reached the end of everything. I didn't have a thought or a doubt of any other kind in me; I only knew that right there was where Old Man Death hung out his sign.

"AS I stood there gazing at the black mouth of that tunnel, not daring to turn my back on it and make a mad rush up to the open, my eye was suddenly arrested by the strip of ledge which ran the whole way across the great roof slab. Something had moved there! My gaze was instantaneously rooted on that spot. It lay in the deep shadow of a huge knob of projecting precipice. For a moment I could not clearly distinguish the slurred outline of the ledge. Then in a flash the mass resolved itself into detail. And what a detail! The whole of that ledge, every inch of it, was alive with those giant vermin! Wherever the rock was not a mere perpendicular surface lay those groups and rows of crouching beastliness. Every head was turned my way, every ghastly, horrible eye was watching me, and except for a few little deliberate shiftings of posture, one of which had caught my eye, the whole crowd stood or lay motionless.

"They were waiting—I didn't have to do any guessing to know for what. They were waiting for us, just as they had waited for those two mountain lions and the deer whose bones lay scattered around and even under my feet—the latest additions to their larder, for undoubtedly countless remains must have been swept away by the numberless freshets of the ages gone. This was the slaughter house of these antediluvian horrors.

"Now, though we had suspicioned that there might be just such a trap down here, yet we hadn't really gripped on to the fact that these vermin had the brains to make good, and even though for the last few minutes, I had got it in my marrow what

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was waiting for me, yet the sight of these ghastly horrors was like a knockout blow to me. I could only stand like a block of wood with my eyes popping out of their sockets; for how long I don't know. Then one of the brutes straightened out his jointed legs and stood up as though to get a better look at me.

"That broke the ice! With a gasp of horror I swung round to make a dash back; there might be a chance of reaching the open ahead of that scum, though the going was tough, all upgrade and a raft of bowlders underfoot. With the first step I shouted a warning to Joe:

"'They're coming, Joe!' I yelled. 'Back quick! Right behind!'

"In that narrow canyon the sound of my voice echoed from wall to wall with the clear bellow of a megaphone. But I had hardly got the words out of my mouth and not gone a couple of yards before his voice came down to me in a roar of warning.

"'Hi, Bill, they all around to rush us! Run, Bill, run!'

"The fear in his voice did not need words to translate it. With a jerk, I halted and faced around again. My brains were working now with the speed of a motion picture camera; images flicked across my gray film. Mixed up with these, the sound of iron-shod boots racing madly over rocks clattered in my ears, and the sharper clang of hoofs going headlong in another direction was unconsciously registered.

"'Look, Bill! Run! They coming!'

"The yell was close behind; round went my head with a convulsive snap; there he was, just turning the bend about two hundred feet away. With clubbed gun he was tearing madly down, and close on his heels poured a river of hell's spewings, a seething flood of black scum. Back of him the whole bottom of the canyon floor was a solid mass of leaping, scrambling, racing vermin; waves of desperately clawing, long-haired, long-legged abortions pouring over—a sea of filthy life.

"In their thousands they must have been cached away in the sides of the gully right from its start. As no doubt times without number they had rushed their game to this logical point, so now they had got us—just two more doomed wretches to pull down and shred into tatters.

"Suddenly the space between Joe and me boiled into life; from every ledge and gap in the steep sides leaped an endless stream of the brutes. The rocks were spewing them out in jets of abomination, leaping from ledge to ledge, sliding, falling down bare glassy drops, crowding each other over with the rush of those behind, and landing with a soft thud on the rocks below; a carpet for the blood-maddened crush behind.

"The place was sweating the filth from every pore; it was as if life was being thrown up, generated, wholesale from the very rocks; an unnatural birth bearing a spawn of elemental horrors. One black torrent was rushing on Joe, another pouring toward me. Screams, awful, nerve-rending screams of fear and agony filled the stagnant canyon air; the burros had been caught and were being torn piecemeal, eaten alive, their flesh assimilated as they screamed.

"At that terrible sound my brain crashed to ruin. I made one wild leap for the tunnel, I was in the water half clawing, half swimming for the dark entrance. Abruptly the bottom of the pool dropped away and, falling forward, I went under. To that I owe my life, for as I fell, black blobs and clawing limbs splashed into the water around me.

"Instinctively, I threw up my arm as if to ward them off, and one of the brutes landed square on my bare forearm. Rods of steel gripped my flesh and one flame of pain swept up my arm as I sank. Mad with terror and pain, I struggled to the top and got a footing alongside the wall. Even in that moment I realized I was under the great overhanging ledge. On my arm, gripped by its long-jointed legs, still hung the vicious thing, its head glued to my flesh. With a gasp of pain I hit the brute with my other fist. Square in the middle I caught it a terrific wallop; it was like hitting a bladder of lard. My fist, with a squelch, went right through its sticky, flabby carcass, and a spray of red and yellow slime burst over me, leaving but a tangle of legs and trailing ribbons of gut and hide whipping my arm.

"The head, though, remained in a death grip lock. I suppose its long, curved tusks were hooked in my flesh, but the bulk of its head hid this from me. Snatching at these quivering remains I tore them from me and dashed the filthy mess against the tunnel side, where for a moment it hung dripping; then slid into the dark moving water and was swept away. It sounds as if I went through a series of separate movements, but no such thing; it was the action of instinct. I doubt if five seconds passed from the time I went under the water.

"As that horror went sailing off I

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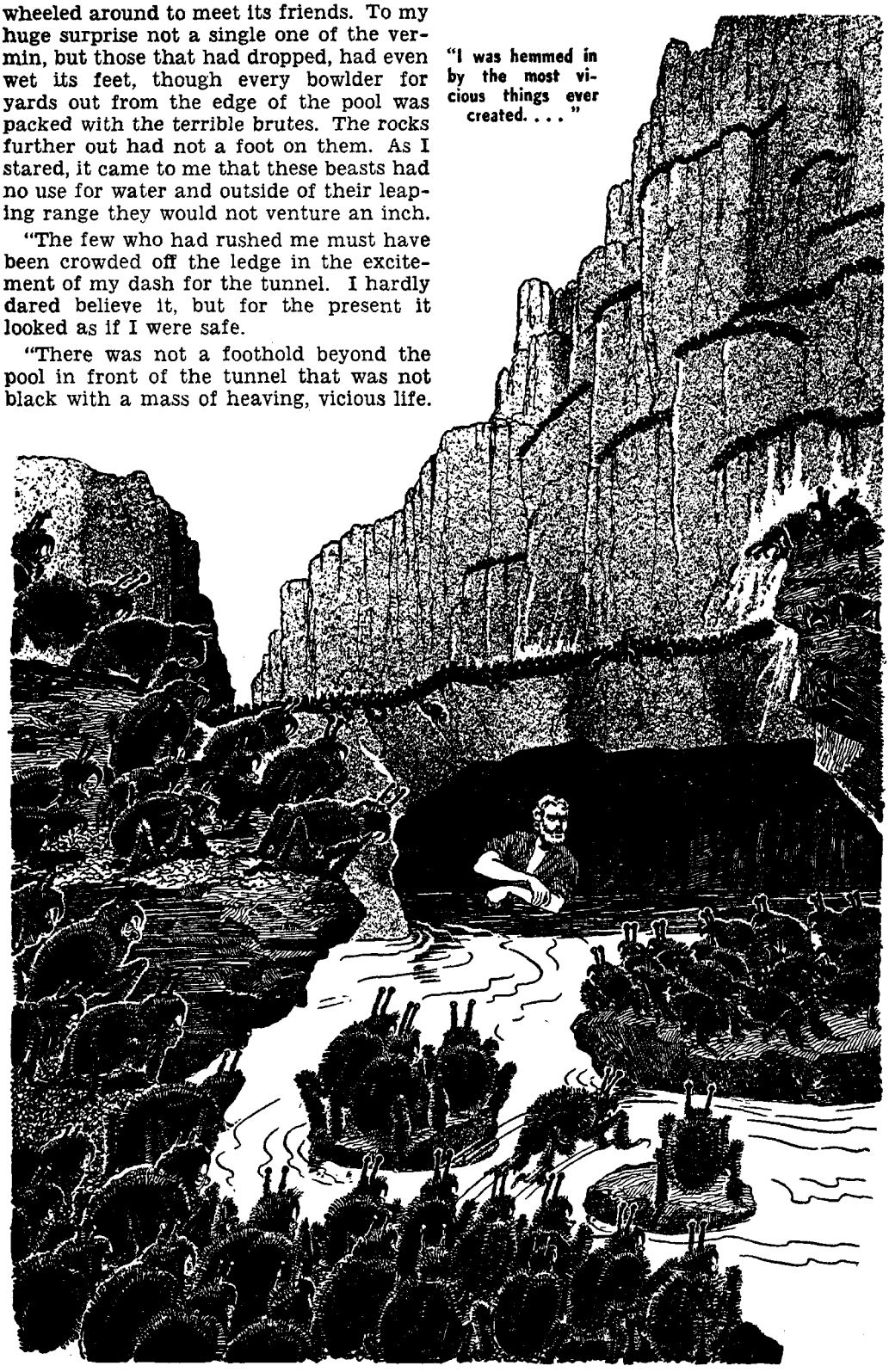
wheeled around to meet its friends. To my huge surprise not a single one of the vermin, but those that had dropped, had even wet its feet, though every bowlder for yards out from the edge of the pool was packed with the terrible brutes. The rocks further out had not a foot on them. As I stared, it came to me that these beasts had no use for water and outside of their leaping range they would not venture an inch.

"The few who had rushed me must have been crowded off the ledge in the excitement of my dash for the tunnel. I hardly dared believe it, but for the present it looked as if I were safe.

"There was not a foothold beyond the pool in front of the tunnel that was not black with a mass of heaving, vicious life.



"I was hemmed in by the most vicious things ever created. . . ."

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The ground was simply solid with crawling, hairy beastliness; for fifty feet back one could not have laid a foot on the bare ground. Still further back they fought in a writhing, tossing sea; they drove ahead in waves and surges of horrible vitality, all making for one certain point. At this point stood Joe, my partner. There he stood hopelessly hemmed in, back to a large bowlder, with gun clubbed, smashing the devils by scores as they rushed on him.

"AT EVERY sweep a fountain of red, heavy slime leaped aloft and fell back on the black struggling filth. His gun barrel—the stock was gone, smashed on a rock likely—bit into them and flung their beastly carcasses to each side in a red splotch of mangled remains. If this had happened in a book, I guess right there was the place to have made a jump out, and along with Joe, smashed the brutes till we cashed in. But I'm just telling things the way they were, and suicide without being a cent's worth of good to anyone never cut any ice with me.

"I didn't stir a foot. You mayn't think overly much of me for saying this, but, hell! What's the good of lying? If I had made a move that way I wouldn't have got twenty feet before I'd been pulled down and the flesh stripped from my bones. So the plain fact is that I stopped right where I was. I guess I've suffered more than Joe did.

"A picture of that nightmare of hell let loose was burnt into my brain so that nothing will wash it out. Day after day it goes with me, as clean-cut and ghastly as the actual minute my eyes took it in. By night I dream of it; by day it stands between me and the world my body moves in. There is no letup; I daren't hit the booze to blot it out, for it might work the wrong way and instead of only the picture, suppose I was to live it!

"There's just one thing left—I think if I could settle up with the scum I'd maybe get a little peace. And that's what I'm hitting south for now. It's taken me years to get the dough so that the job will be done right, but I've got all fixed now, and I'm on my way to even up with the vermin—maybe to wind up the way Joe went out; but no matter, I'll get rest either way.

"As I said, I just stood there rooted to the spot with the water swirling by nearly waist deep, the black darkness of the tunnel behind and the gray light of the canyon ahead. And there was Joe clubbing the pulpy brutes to red slush as they swept up in waves to the front. They had the awful spirit of ants and hornets, who I guess with a trifle more brain weight would lick the finest troops ever raised.

"Thousands of the brutes were madly fighting to get inside the sweep of that gun barrel; as fast as the front line went splashing aside another wave came rushing in. From every side streams were racing up; the walls were curtained with scrambling, leaping filth. There could be only one end to the ghastly struggle, and in a flash it came. Not a word of warning could I shout—though it would have been useless. Only my eyes seemed alive at that minute, and they saw a black wave leap to the top of the bowlder at the back of Joe. It came up like a wave on a rocky beach, the flowing movement of a liquid, moving mass. For a second it seemed poised on the top; then, with a black spray it dropped—and there was nothing else.

"All that was there was a great throbbing pyramid of abomination which in the same second became a huge heaving mound with the surrounding thousands pouring in on it. I guess my gray matter right there had soaked in all it could take up, for I don't remember anything after that.

"I found myself lying face upward on a water-covered rock with just a few inches of my head above the water line. I was desperately weak—most likely from loss of blood. That brute had torn a town lot out of my arm, and for a moment I hadn't a notion where I was, and didn't care. For a little while I lay there; then bit by bit snapshots came flickering into my brain, and soon running in an unbroken film I picked up memory again. I wish to God I hadn't come back to consciousness.

"Well, when I got wise to the state of affairs I saw that there was no doubt but these things wouldn't tackle the water, and so long as I stopped where I was I would be safe. Feeling pretty sick and weak, I dragged myself up on the highest point of the rock, though this was awash, and sat up. I guess I was twenty feet back from the entrance of the tunnel, and the open space in front showed up like looking through a telescope. The sun was striking in on the far end—by which I reckoned I must have been lying there some little time—and the light was good above the towering walls of the canyon.

"The devils were still swarming all over the place, not bunched up but moving restlessly, except when they came to the edge of the pool. Then they would line

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up, crouch motionless for a while, and I could feel their beastly eyes were searching over every inch of me that wasn't under water. They were so close that their blasted anatomy was as plain as a good print.

"What to call them I don't have any idea; sort of spidery they were, yet they weren't spiders, for I'll take an oath their headpieces were more after the baboon; sort of reminded you somehow of one about the skull, with its mat of coarse hair and what looked like slits of nostrils above the blubbery mouth, which was hung all around with rolls of drooping flesh, something like a bulldog, yet without the clean, wholesome look his ugly jaw has got. Two long tusks, thin flat things maybe two inches long and curved inward, black as their hides, dropped one each side from the top jaw. Terrible weapons they were, and would give them a grip like a steel trap.

"Those stalk eyes of theirs didn't improve their looks any; the way they could throw around in any direction those squirming snakelike stalks was sickening. They must have been several inches long, though they seemed to contract all the time. It sort of fascinated me; I couldn't keep my eyes off them.

"The coal black buttonlike eyes at the tip of these stalks stared at one with such a cold, deliberate gaze that you knew right there that these abortions had brains with something of the human about them—and I guess it was just this nerve-shattering idea as much as their filthy looks that raised the skin on your spine in prickly ridges. I tell you they were beauties from whatever angle you took them, the thrown-out scrappings of hell.

CHAPTER IV

THE ONLY THING THAT MATTERS

"HOW I got through that day I can never rightly say. Hour after hour dragged by, and though the sun soon hit full blaze into the canyon, except upon the pool which in the shadow of a bluff could never be struck by a single ray, the tunnel didn't warm up any, but stayed as cold as ever. It was real chilly in there. You see, I was sitting up to my waist in water and had lost a lot of blood from that blasted bite, so that with that and the nervous shock of the last horrible scene, I shortly began to go numb in my muscles and wander in my mind. The picture ahead started to mist over and the creek and the rocks to shift and jiggle.

"The next thing I knew, my face was under the water, and for a moment I didn't seem to care if it stayed there. But I guess old man Life has some powerful strong hooks in us which he jerks on now and again when his fish get sliding downstream too far. Anyway, he pulled me up sharp, for a little picture of a man's body sailing along a creek came into my head, and waiting for the body were about a million of these black vermin.

"That woke me up. The thought of being torn up by that bunch, even though dead as a mummy, sent a spurt of horror running through every nerve. I hitched myself up on that rock again. I was going to hold on from now until my flesh got washed away by the friction of the water; if I had to strap myself on I'd do it somehow, but not a blasted one was going to get a meal off me. I saw clearly that once I lost grip of myself again the chances were that no further message would have the punch to pierce my doped nerve cables and get through to the receiving office, and I would surely wander into the dark trail which ends up at the country of No Return.

"A new spirit was born in me by reason of a savage determination not to allow my lifeless body to be picked to pieces by these abominable vermin. Now with suddenly renewed brain power and invigorated mind I set about preserving the life I had been so willing to quit a few moments back.

"Yes, I would live and somehow escape to return one day and repay in full all I owed these brutes; make one great glorious slaughter house of this canyon, and exterminate utterly every single one of those thousands. The creek should run all its depth a solid mass of shattered remains and thick, red blood after some brilliant combination of fire and poison gas.

"I guess my head was running wild at the time—off on a trail of its own—for the wildest ideas were followed up as the most practical of schemes and easy as turning a handle. And all the time I was a miserable forsaken microbe, without grub, no arms, alone in the wilderness and hemmed in by the most hideous and vicious things ever created. I was off my head all right. But I had sense enough to strive to keep my blood circulating and my muscles from cramping by waving my arms about, pinching my legs and moving my body around as well as the strained position I was in would allow.

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"I did somehow manage to get through the day without going under again, though I reckon it was more by sheer determination to stay alive and even up with that murderous scum rather than by any physical powers of endurance I possessed. At last the sun's rays skipped the canyon and after another lifetime the light became quite plainly lessened. For some while the excited brutes had been gradually quieting down, and now the sun was setting appeared to be getting sluggish and bunching together in clumps as though for warmth. Farther up the canyon I even saw that quite a number were scrambling up the walls and disappearing over the bluffs as though they had a notion of getting out before dark fell.

"It looked to me as probable enough that these things had no liking for the cold night air of the canyon and were beating it, while the remainder at the end, rooted to the spot by the sight of me just out of reach, might very likely become torpid. In a second hope had thawed my numbed nerves. The plan I had determined upon would be a simple matter if this was the case.

"I had clearly enough realized that my one and only chance of escape lay in a dash through the lower end of the tunnel. From my position I could not see if the brutes were also down there or not, and I did not dare make my way to the point to discover this, for the vermin watching me were, I felt dead sure, quite capable of reasoning out the meaning of any such move of mine and cutting me off long before I could get clear. But this evident dislike for the chilly night air down here put a new value on my chances.

"Whatever was waiting for me at the other end, it looked like they might be so sluggish that a sudden bold dash would carry me through before the brutes had time to thaw out.

"ANOTHER long wait, and then the light faded away and night came with a swoop, as it does in these latitudes. Then it started to get really cold. It had just been chilly before, but now it bit into my marrow. What had to be done must be done at once, for a few hours longer here would be my finish.

"Luckily the moon, which was nearly full, was due to rise shortly after sunset. Shortly the first ray of white, ghastly light struck one wall at the top and slipped slowly downward until it hit the bottom, where the huddled heaps of vermin lay very still and horrible. Dark motionless heaps of torpid evil life, shapeless in their tight-packed clusters, in their very stillness they were terrible.

"For a little while I waited, keenly scanning the brutes and trying to gauge their condition. But, except for a slight tremor of those on the outside pressing inward, they showed never a sign of the devilish vitality which during the day possessed them. There was no doubt of it, the low temperature of the night air down here had affected their heat loving carcasses and had numbed their viciously active brains.

"Now was my time. With nervous haste, yet taking care not to make any abrupt move or the slightest sound, I slid gently off my perch. For a little way the water was deep and unbroken, and without a move I drifted along with the current. Farther down it shallowed, and half swimming, half wading, stumbling and bruising myself, I made my way through the hundred feet or so of pitch dark tunnel. At the lower end the creek was maybe half again as wide as at the upper, but shallow and strewn with many large bowlders. Though the moon caught everything away from the near wall, yet great black blotches of shadow were splashed everywhere.

"Cautiously I crept to the very limit of the tunnel and peered out. Not a sign of life was visible in the hard white light which struck coldly on bare wall and bowlder. The dense black shadows were only blank gaps, and their edges sharp as a pen-stroke held the outline of only their cause—the rocks. Stepping a few feet back, I groped in the water for a small stone. Throwing this lightly outside, I watched intently for the faintest sign of movement. My eyes at the moment were as sensitive as the finest camera lens ever made.

"Not a shadow varied its outline. The brutes were either sunk in torpor or else had quit entirely. I felt a sudden rush of hot blood sweep my body. The discovery was like a bottle of champagne drained by a starving man. I lost control of myself, and shortly afterward found I was running madly in the shallow water at the edge of the moonlit wall. All I had in my head was to put as much of God's good earth between me and those horrors as was possible, and as quickly as possible. I ran and ran. It seemed I was soon running through endless space. There came great stretches of blank nothingness be-

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tween brief periods of sensation when I dimly knew that I was madly racing away from the hell behind me. Now and again I found myself sprawling on the rocks.

"My nerves had gone smash, plumb shot to rags. How long or how far I went like this I don't know, though I guess it must have been through most of that night, for when the Indians picked me up, by a rough reckoning I made later, that spot must have been a good two days' march from the valley of vermin. I guess that I just ran the mad life right out of me and without any warning my lights blinked out.

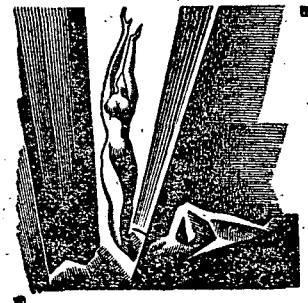
"Anyway, when I dropped back to earth again my brain was as clear as a polished mirror, and each moment of the hideous past took its right place in the terrible film stamped upon my brain—that is, up to the moment of leaving the tunnel. What happened after that is no more than a black fog with flashes of light in spots.

"THERE is little more to tell. Those Indians cured that poison bite. It had festered badly, and my arm was the size of a small barrel. Why they troubled over me, or even had waived their usual method of greeting a helpless stranger—the prompt slitting of his throat—were matters that I could never fathom, for they spoke a tongue entirely strange to me, and left me in the charge of an ancient, sour-tempered female who obviously viewed me with the utmost dislike. But she certainly was some medico and patched me up with the application of poultices whose whiff would have made an embalmer turn faint, but they worked.

"I mended rapidly, and before long could stand on my feet without seeing the ground rise up and do a jazz. And then I got my marching papers. Three burnt images put me on a bony cayuse and took me a trip which lasted all one morning, unloaded me into nowhere, and pointing generously to the south galloped back due north.

"I knew what my number would be if I was fool enough to forget which way I was heading. They left me the rags I had been picked up in and a small rawhide bag of sun-dried meat. Everything else was gone. The sugar sack with the handful of nuggets I had scooped up at the upper end of the valley and had forgotten to take out of my shirt, had vanished.

"With no hope of ever arriving any-



IN THE NEXT ISSUE

Earth's Last Citadel

By C. L. Moore and Henry Kuttner

At the dying Earth's flaming Source of Power, Alan Drake pitted puny human strength against the all-consuming Alien's irresistible might—in lost mankind's last struggle for survival. A strange novel of cosmic dark magic which you will not want to miss. . . .

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where, I hiked dismally on according to orders. I might as well leave my bones to whiten there as any other place. But fate had a big trump up her sleeve, and played it just in the nick of time, or maybe the Indians knew of and meant that I should fall in with the party of Britishers who were rambling around in this forsaken land, chasing up all the strange bugs in it.

"It was around about dark I caught sight of their campfire, and what with thirst and being played right out, I made straight for the camp. I didn't care who they were. I nearly dropped dead when I heard the good old mother tongue and caught sight of half a dozen men all in swell get-up, riding breeches, clean shirts and all the rest of it just as neat as a page out of a department store catalogue. Regular swells they were; the head guy had a handle to his name, but they were real white men. Rigged me up in new duds and fed me up as though I was a long lost brother of the whole bunch, instead of being just a ragged scarecrow without five cents in the world.

"The next morning they started on their way back to the coast, and I was with them. I never told them a thing—just gave out I had been prospecting around with a partner who had cashed in when we both took sick of fever. What was the good of spilling the beans? Bugs were what they were after, and I guess steel cables wouldn't have held them from taking a chance of rounding up the sort I had been up against.

"Then one of two things was bound to happen—either the whole party would have been permanent residents up there, or the survivors would have been followed by the biggest mining stampede the world has ever seen. Likely enough I should have been in on it, but somehow I didn't cotton to seeing our find turned inside out by a crowd of strangers.

"Not that I was wanting to hog everything myself, but this was a private matter between me and those murdering brutes alone, and had got to be fixed up first. So I held my tongue and gave out that the hole in my arm was due to a burst gun barrel.

"Well, I got to the coast and finally worked my way back home. There you have the whole yarn; the years since then don't interest you. Maybe you believe what I've told you, maybe you don't. It doesn't rile me any whichever way you take it. I'm on my road there now. I've got a fine outfit shipped to Vera Cruz, where I'll pick it up, and I'm going right back there to make a clean-up of that bunch. After that I don't know which way the cat will jump—depends how I feel when I've evened up the score."

"But surely," said I, as this strange man ceased to speak and gazed thoughtfully out of the window, "you don't intend to totally exterminate the whole colony of those things without giving the world a chance to investigate such extraordinary creatures? Why, man, the great museums would pay you a fortune for a few specimens. It would be an unspeakable crime. But of course you're not serious."

"I don't give a cent. All I know is, they're going to be wiped out. I hate them so there's no room for any other sort of thought. I'm going to watch them die, by thousands, and slowly."

Away deep down in his cold grey eyes there lay a horror so terrible that I felt a something within me recoil as though it had received a physical blow, and yet his voice was as steady and colorless as a pilot's on the bridge of a mammoth liner. Somehow this very absence of outward emotion left me strongly convinced that I had been listening to a simple relation of fact, incredible though it might appear in cold print. A consuming desire to learn the immediate future of this unique individual came upon me. The train was slowing up to a little tin shed stuck by itself in the red-hot sand alongside the track; away up in the hills a cluster of white dots caught the eye. This was the town of Leadbank—my destination.

"Look here, I stop off here. I should like to have had a little more talk with you. I've got to know the rest. I trust—I beg you will one day get in touch with me. Here is my card; cable at my expense anything you feel like."

He took the proffered card, glanced at it, and the ghost of a smile flicked his features.

"That's it, eh? I thought you had some time or other taken a hand in the game, but I didn't reckon on your being a mining expert. You could have me tracked and swipe the whole caboodle, but I some way reckon you won't, and that's what you're telling me by handing me this card. Yes, if I come through you'll hear about it. I promise you that. If you don't hear from me inside of six months, just forget it. I've failed, that's all. So-long."

We shook hands. I am still waiting. The six months have gone by, but the cable has not come.

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FANTASY BOOK REVIEWS

By Sam Moskowitz

All books intended for review purposes should be addressed by their publishers to, Fantasy Book Review, Fantastic Novels, 205 East 42nd St., New York 17, N. Y.

OF CLASSIC STATURE

ROADS by Seabury Quinn. Arkham House, Sauk City, Wisconsin: 110 pages, $2.00.

Every author at some time or another writes the story which is the crowning glory of his career, and often, if he writes for another fifty years, he finds himself incapable of duplicating or surpassing that work.

Roads is Seabury Quinn's masterpiece, and Quinn, veteran fantasy writer of hundreds of tales and creator of the popular **Jules de Grandin** has written a fantastic Christmas tale of such stature that it inspires comparison with Charles Dickens' immortal **Christmas Carol.**

The story, set in its early phases against the background of Biblical Jerusalem, oppressed by the Roman conquerors, inspires the character of Claus, a giant, blond Norseman, paid soldier in the employ of Rome, who saves the Christ-child from Herod's savage order, that every first-born Jewish male infant be killed. As a result, he is blessed with immortality, which he shares in common with a young girl who is saved by Christ from a life of disease and degradation.

The two of them go forth together, and traveling northward, originate the Christmas idea of making gifts and distributing them among the children. Driven ever northward by the persecution of the ignorant who misinterpret their motives, they eventually arrive in the Arctic valley of the **Aelfman,** where they aid in setting up giant work shops. All year round the **Aelfs** build toys, which Claus distributes.

"Odin's name is but a memory, and in all the world none serves his altars, but Claus is very real today and every year ten thousand times ten thousand gleeful children await his coming; for he is neither Claudius the gladiator, nor Claus the mighty man of war, but Santa Claus, the very patron saint of little children."

This is not a child's tale, but a story for adults, written with authentic dialogue and background; with a superb command of the language, and indisputably a great classic of fantasy.

THE LEGEND OF ATLANTIS

THE SUNKEN WORLD by Stanton A. Coblentz. The Fantasy Publishing Company, Inc., 8318 Avalon Blvd., Los Angeles 3, Cal.: 184 pages, $3.00.

In the realm of fiction as well as in legend,

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the mystery evolved through the persistent hints of a sunken continent have long intrigued the civilized world. Man saw in the story the possibility that the golden age for man might once have existed, and when catastrophe destroyed Atlantis, so perished his own dreams of a perfect world.

Stanton A. Coblentz, well-known poet, has taken this eternal legend and written "a romance of Atlantis" that is in many ways a model of its kind. Atlantis still exists beneath a great glass dome, constructed in time to save its inhabitants from disaster, and is reached by a super-submarine. The description of the past glories of this ancient society, its customs, people and culture is old-style science fiction, incorporating a touch of the older still utopian tales, and therefore an effective foil for the lightning thrusts of satire which are Coblentz's forte.

The scientific aspects of the story are carefully developed and generally sound. I believe that even the sophisticated new readers of science fiction will succumb to the appeal of this story.

GUEST REVIEW

THE CARNELIAN CUBE by L. Sprague de Camp and Fletcher Pratt. The Gnome Press, 421 Claremont Parkway, N. Y. 57, N. Y.: 230 pages. $3.00.

Readers who remember these authors' two previous collaborations—**The Incomplete Enchanter** and **Land of Unreason**—will approach this third one with a good deal of anticipation. They are sure to be entertained and often amused by it, and probably a little disappointed, too, for **The Carnelian Cube** does not duplicate the high standards of its predecessors. But then, what fantasy novel does these days?

There are three separate episodes in the book, every one in a different dream-world, and archeologist Arthur Cleveland Finch gets himself into plenty of adventurous trouble in each. It all begins on an expedition in Asia Minor when he encounters a carnelian cube engraved with cryptic Etruscan characters. This cube, he discovers, is a "dreamstone," and if the owner sleeps with it under his pillow he will be taken to heaven.

The first "heaven" he lands in is an interesting feudal hierarchy where people are named according to their occupations. Finch Arthur Poet finds himself in progressively hotter water, and escapes into heaven number two just one jump ahead of the forces of law and order.

This second world likewise has a feudal set-up, but it proves to be anarchistic than anything else, what with Kentucky colonels and their retainers feuding furiously all over the Southern landscape. There are no end of goofily unusual characters here, but it is a familiar seductive siren whose ardent pursuit of Finch causes him to use the carnelian cube yet a third time.

I suspect the final locale is intended as a semi-satire on modern scientific methods; but totally aside from that it is probably the most intriguing of all three, ending the novel on a pleasant note. I, for one, wish Messrs. de Camp and Pratt would put their imaginations together more often.

—A. Langley Searles

DOUBLE-THREAT

THE SOLITARY HUNTERS and THE ABYSS by David H. Keller, M.D. New Era Publishers, 1366 E. Columbia Ave., Philadelphia 25, Pa.: 265 pages. $3.00.

The many admirers of the irrepressible Dr. Keller will be pleased to know that two more of his novels have appeared in book form. The first of them, **The Solitary Hunters,** is a novel of legendary fame, because when it was first published serially, each of its three parts was judged the best thing in the issue, beating out such mighty champions of fantasy as A. Merritt, Robert E. Howard and Clark Ashton Smith. Whether you agree with the verdict or not, you will find in this novel of giant insects a unique, utterly droll writing style; good, fast-action adventure, and something to think about.

The second novel, **The Abyss,** even longer than its companion, appears in print for the first time. The story revolves around the concept of chemically producing a mental attitude in the minds of all of the inhabitants of the city of New York, which will make them think and act along the lines of the ancient Romans. Dr. Keller, a lifelong psychiatrist, has a field day in decribing the carnage resulting from a psychology altered so drastically in a great mass.

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The handling of the plot is completely original, and the first two-thirds of the novel is powerfully expounded as amazing and thrilling episodes crowd upon one another. The very end might leave the reader to wonder if the situation had not been fictionally developed out of bounds, but Dr. Keller is right there to debate the point, and in this tale, as in many other Keller-yarns, you will find that Dr. Keller is one author who can preach a moral without one whit effecting the entertainment value of his story.

THE CURSE OF ETERNAL WAKEFULNESS

SLAVES OF SLEEP by L. Ron Hubbard. Shasta Publishers, 5525 Blackstone, Chicago, Ill.: 207 pages. $3.00.

The talented author of **Final Blackout** discards the dark mantle of prophetic warning and conceives in **Slaves of Sleep** a light fantasy intended for sheer escape.

Jan Palmer, heir to a large steamship line, is a Casper Milquetoast sort of a fellow who is harried and treated with disrespect by every close associate and relative except his secretary, who loves him. An odd bottle he has picked up in the course of his curio collecting turns out to be one of the original containing a Genie. This is discovered when an injudicious visitor is killed upon opening the bottle and Jan Palmer is cursed by the Genie with "The sleep of eternal wakefulness." Suspected as the murderer of his visitor, Jan Palmer is arrested, and when he falls asleep in his cell finds that he is transferred to another plane of existence, where he is Tiger, a tough, resourceful, somewhat capricious sailor, who is in his every action the antithesis of Palmer's wakeful self.

In this strange land, Ifrits reign supreme and human are slaves.

The adroit shifts between worlds; the cleverly managed contrasts of character between Tiger and Jan Palmer, and the humorous **Arabian Nights** element, add up to an evening's light entertainment.

Art lovers will be thrilled by the superb multi-color cover-jacket executed by Hannes Bok; a jacket which uniquely contains no advertising, but is an illustration which completely embraces the book.

WE ARE PROPERTY!

SINISTER BARRIER by Eric Frank Russell. Fantasy Press, P. O. Box 159, Reading, Pa.: 253 pages. $3.00.

Charles Fort, author of such compilations of contrarily inexplicable facts as **Lo!** and **Wild Talents** is the god-father of this novel, inasmuch as it was from his books that Eric Frank Russel culled the original idea that forms the framework of this novel.

Simply, the story is based on the premise that the earth and the people on it are "property," owned by superior creatures from out of space. It supposes that our every action is guided by them and we are their "cattle," to be used, nurtured or slaughtered to their own best interests.

"Swift death awaits the first cow that leads the revolt against milking," and Bill Graham, who convinces himself that human beings are controlled by other forms of life, leads an exciting chase through many pages of fiction as he attempts to warn the world of the danger it faces, help organize resistance, and still avoid the grim death that would be his punishment in the normal course of events.

The story is competently written, well-thought-out and proceeds at a fast pace, but suffers acutely from weak characterization, this reviewer finding himself constantly faced with the danger of losing track of the hero altogether. Despite this, the unit effect is good and you will probably want to own this expanded verison of **Sinister Barrier,** adorned by four Cartier drawings and handsomely printed.

"SEASONED" FANTASY ART

FANTASY CALENDAR FOR 1950

The Gnome Press, 421 Claremont Parkway, N. Y. 57, N. Y.: 13 pages. $1.00.

Every once in a while an item comes up in the fantasy field of such novelty, that though it may not be a book, it deserves special mention. Such items were the Finlay and Lawrence portfolios introduced by **Famous Fantastic Mysteries,** and this idea, **The Fantasy Calendar** is as noteworthy, with Hannes Bok, Edd Cartier and Frank R. Paul illustrating it, and including an original illustration from *Fantastic Novels.*

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MR. PRIMROSE Goes to the Devil

By

William P. Templeton

MR. PRIMROSE had deviated from the truth for so many years that, at the age of forty-five, he was recognized throughout the village of Stoop and beyond as an inveterate liar. His sister, a pious woman who kept house for him, regularly brought the fact to his notice.

"You had too much port again last night, Samuel."

"Had I, Ethel? I felt all right." He spoke in a mild, conciliatory voice.

"You told the vicar that you once hunted *wapiti* in Alaska. You know very well that you've never been near Alaska."

"No, that's right."

He averted his eyes guiltily and began to hum softly.

"Don't evade me, Samuel," continued his sister. "You were lying worse than ever. Mark me, no good will come of it."

But he remained unrepentant.

The village of Stoop nestles among hills. It is picturesque and sheltered, and Mr. Primrose lived in the most picturesque and sheltered of its houses. He lived comfortably. His father had left a considerable sum of money, and he himself had done well in business. To the horror of his sister, he had retired at the early age of forty-two.

"But," she had protested, "what do you intend to be doing for the rest of your life?"

"Nothing."

"Nothing! You're only forty-two, Samuel Primrose. You don't mean to tell me you're going to do no more work! I never heard of such a thing. Your father worked till he was seventy."

"Well," he had temporized, pursing his lips, "perhaps not exactly nothing. I'd like to travel again. There's that castle in Spain where I spent such happy times with my old friend. . . ."

He reversed the ancient dishonorable pact with the devil, and took the punishment first and Paradise last. . . .

"Samuel!"

"Anyway, I'd like to travel," he said sheepishly.

But although Mr. Primrose read a great number of books like *The Mystic East, A Year on the Amazon, Among the Pygmy People; Travels in Tibet, Across the Gobi, and Perils of Patagonia,* and although he received each new list of Cook's Tours as it was issued, the garden continued to occupy his time.

He passed the months enjoyably enough, regaling the vicar and his friends with a more and more astonishing collection of personal anecdotes, undeterred by the fact that most of them had followed his unadventurous career from his earliest boyhood.

There were times, during the telling of a tale, when the Rev. George Barge himself almost believed the fantastic adventures, so candid were the brown eyes. But, afterward, when he thought about it, the whole fabric became so impossible that, slightly piqued at even a momentary credulity, he sometimes remarked to Miss Primrose, "An excellent man in many respects your brother! It is a great pity that he is so addicted to falsehood. An unconscious habit, no doubt, but none the less regrettable in so worthy a man."

"I'm forever telling him," she said primly, "that no good will come of it."

She was quite right. No good did come of it.

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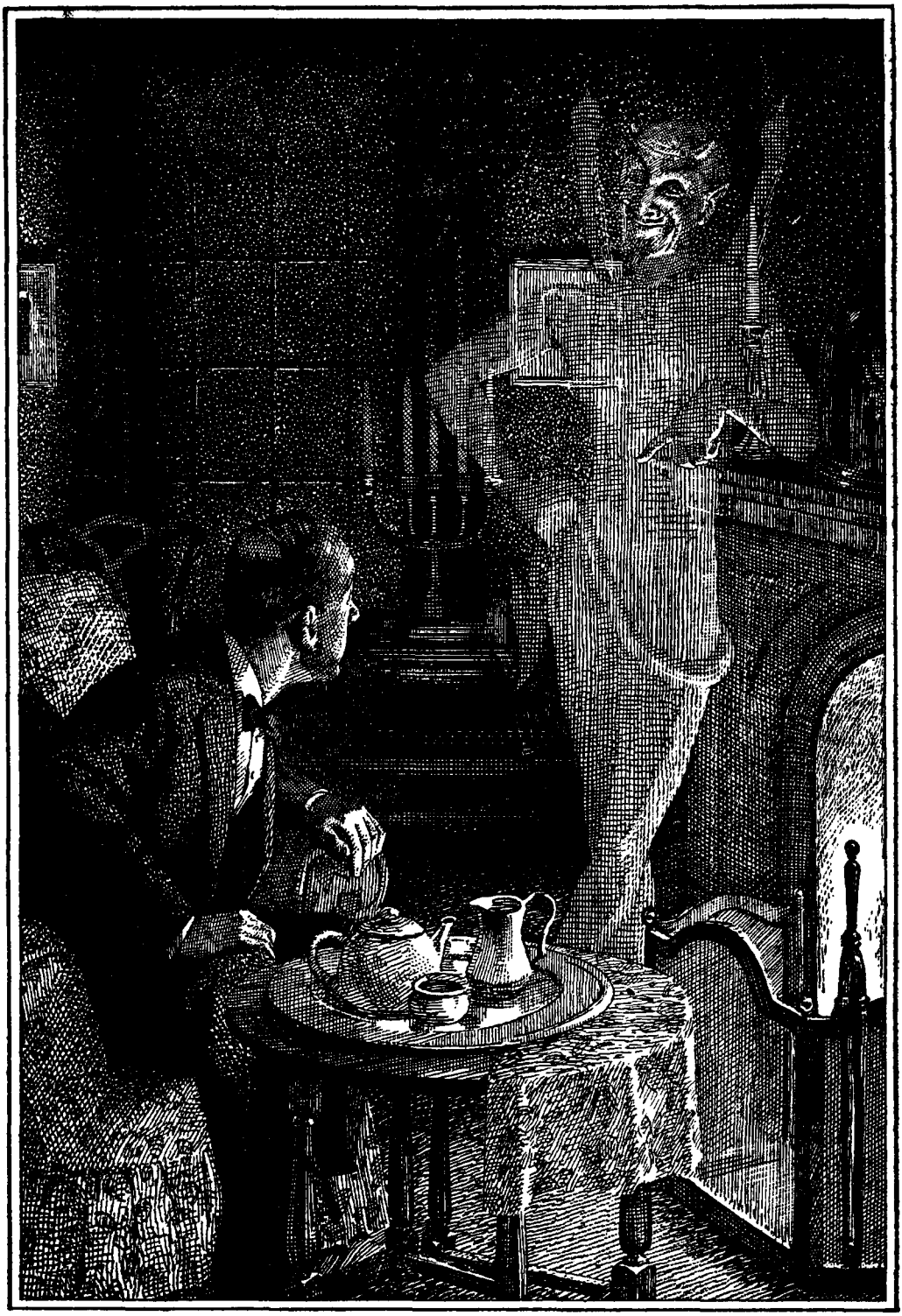

"Of course," said Mephistopheles,
"I have no wish to be unfair. . . ."

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ONE morning in early Spring, when a pale sun made silver threads of the fine rain, Mr. Primrose was paddling about the garden in a mackintosh. It was a large garden with, at the far end, a pond and a pigsty. A litter of piglets was scampering about their sow. Ducks, swaying unsteadily on their feet, were noisily sucking up mud. Daffodils were out, and primroses. Under a bench was a sprinkling of violets. He sat on the damp wood and noted absently that the branches of the lilac tree were tipped with green. The honeysuckle, too, was budding.

He lit his pipe. The rain was drizzling to a finish. The wind smelt freshly of vegetation. He watched the smoke curl among the branches of one of the apple-trees. "After all," he mused, "there's something attractive about spring in England. I always used to think it came too blatantly in Italy."

A voice in the trees said, "Where?"

Mr. Primrose repeated "Italy" before he realized that he was alone. He rubbed his nose.

The voice persisted, "You've never been in Italy, have you?"

Mr. Primrose continued to contemplate the blue spiral of smoke. His brow was furrowed slightly. "This is the influence of that infernal parson," he whispered. "Of course I've been in Italy. Lake Como. . . ."

"I don't think you have," said the voice decidedly.

Mr. Primrose opened his mouth to argue, but closed it again and sat thinking.

There was a short silence. The voice spoke again. "I'd like a word with you later, Primrose, old man."

For a long time, Mr. Primrose listened, but there remained only the familiar sounds of piglets snuffling for their food, ducks sucking mud, and the earth stirring after rain.

By the evening, he was chuckling over the incident. He sat alone in his study. He switched off all the lights save one, a green-shaded bulb which threw a yellow circle over his bent head. The rest of the room flickered in the warm glow from the fire. Shadows licked out from chairs and were gone again; crept up the walls stealthily and leaped suddenly into light. As the fire died, the roof grew quieter and darker.

Occasionally the paws of a cat lightly moved the pebbles on the path outside the window; the wind sighed in the trees or tapped a branch of ivy against the pane; an arch of coal collapsed in the fire. Under a glass case on the mantelpiece a grotesque gnome with a hammer spun backward and forward ticking away the minutes.

"About our little talk this morning," said a voice.

Mr. Primrose's eyes opened very wide, and he said without moving his head, "Eh?"

"About our little talk this morning," the voice repeated obligingly. It was quite plain, low and rather mocking, from somewhere by the hearth.

Still without moving, but with cold beads of sweat forming on his brow, Mr. Primrose exclaimed, "This is devilish!"

There was a deep, quiet laugh, and the voice said, "Ha! you've guessed it."

Mr. Primrose raised his head slowly. Mephistopheles, tall, thin, dull red, was standing by the fire smiling and stroking his short beard. The fire had become considerably brighter and the flames seemed to shoot about his spare figure.

Mr. Primrose bore the shock remarkably well. He gulped twice and tightened his grip on the arm of the chair. The Devil made an ingratiating gesture with his lean fingers. "Primrose, old man," he said, "you're a bit of a liar, aren't you?"

Mr. Primrose ran his tongue quickly over his dry lips. "Am I?" he asked.

"I mean Alaska and Italy and all that." The Devil smiled indulgently. "Of course, I lie myself now and then, but never that sort of out-and-outer. I find it more effective merely to distort the truth." He leaned his sharp elbow on the mantelpiece and crossed his legs.

His host waited for the outcome of the visit in some trepidation.

"Of course," said the Devil, "you want to know why I've come. Quite natural. Well, it occurred to me that it might be amusing to transport you to any place you say you've been." He spoke lightly, his thin lips pulled into a cold smile.

Mr. Primrose furrowed his brows, trying to follow this line of thought. The Devil waved his hand as if the matter were humorous enough but on the whole trivial.

"Let me explain. I like explaining things. My idea is to legitimize your lies. If you say you've been to Alaska—why, I immediately send you there. The lie ceases to be a lie, or at least it becomes only a lie in the Fourth Dimension, which is nothing at all. You get the idea? I thought it rather good when it struck me."

Mr. Primrose pondered. He wondered

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just why the Devil was smirking so much.

"Of course," said Mephistopheles, "I've no wish to be unfair. Tonight, I've come only to warn you. Suppose we begin tomorrow morning. The first and second time, I'll bring you back here after your adventure"—he smiled—"but the third time I can't guarantee anything. You understand I'm fairly busy."

Mr. Primrose studied the point of his pencil, and after a few seconds glanced up hopefully to see if his visitor had gone, but he was still there.

"Well," said the Devil, "we'll leave it at that just now. But no doubt I'll see you again. On no account let this matter worry you, Primrose, old man. You'll see the funny side once we get started. It really is highly amusing. *Au revoir.*"

The Devil waved his hand munificently. Mr. Primrose expected him to disappear in the spectacular tradition with a burst of flame and smoke, but he faded slowly, like the Cheshire Cat, the grin lingering to the last.

When Mr. Primrose had stopped staring open-mouthed at nothing, he realized that the fire was out. The ashes were gray and cold. He rubbed his face with his hand, and looked for a moment at the gnome whirring backward and forward tapping away time with his small metal hammer. He shivered.

* * *

THE morning broke in sunshine. Mr. Primrose woke with troubled thoughts of his visitor, but when he opened his eyes and saw everything clear-cut and solid in the light, he smiled quietly. "A dream," he said in relief.

Again he spent the evening in his study. As darkness and silence fell about the house, he sat almost expectantly. He tried to read, but at each sound, each whisper of the wind, each tiny explosion of coal-gas in the fireplace, he raised his head. The gnome continued to spin under the glass case.

Nothing untoward happened.

"Stuff and nonsense," said Mr. Primrose, closing his book and rising at last. He rubbed his face. "I'm a bit of a fool, too, in my way."

He snapped off the light and sauntered away to bed.

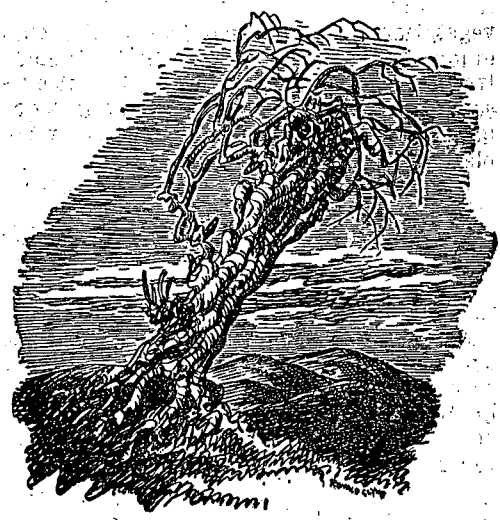
"Of course," he murmured when he had pulled the blankets up to his neck, "when one has lived among the less civilized races, one comes to believe in the supernatural."

He was surprised to see a faint glimmer of light glow in intensity beside his bed.

"Not," he added aloud hurriedly, "not that I've ever lived among any of the less civilized races."

He repeated it more emphatically. The light vanished.

"Odd," he said as he pressed his head into the pillow, "extremely odd. I'm not dreaming. There was a light." Puzzling over it, he fell asleep.



When he awoke the following morning, he had forgotten the phenomenon.

For a few days he stuck so strictly to the truth that it alarmed his sister. But by the end of the week, on Saturday evening, he sat, mellowed with port, blinking at the fire. The vicar, a staunch friend of his sister, had called, and was talking authoritatively about slum conditions in towns.

Vaguely he heard his sister say, "I agree with you. It is deplorable that people have to live without proper food. But such conditions seem to be universal. I've read that the Chinese peasant, for example, has little more than rice to eat."

The vicar permitted himself a quiet smile. "Very true. I myself am a man of simple tastes, but I confess I'm partial to variety. Certainly it must be thoroughly depressing to eat the same course to every meal."

There was a pause, and Mr. Primrose murmured, "It is."

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They both looked at him.

He blinked at the fire. "I can remember living for months on nothing but pemmican." The wind rose suddenly, but he did not hear it.

"I beg your pardon." said the vicar.

"Pemmican," repeated Mr. Primrose.

His sister stiffened against the back of her chair, and her lips became a fine line.

"Yes," said Mr. Primrose. "It's a meat dried and pounded and compressed into cakes. They carry it on polar expeditions."

"Then," said the vicar, "you had it with you in Alaska?"

Mr. Primrose stared at him blankly for a moment. "Alaska? Oh, no. No. Farther north." His eyes sought the fire and became glassy. "Yes. It was a terrible experience. Alone; ice and snow as far as eye could see; feet and hands frostbitten; nothing to eat but pemmican, and not much of that."

"Really?" said the vicar.

Mr. Primrose launched into his story with zest.

Two hours later, the vicar had gone, and Mr. Primrose rubbed his hands, pursed his lips and wandered away to his study. It was his habit to avoid his sister's eye on such occasions.

The fire in the room was out, but he lit an electric radiator and placed it near the desk. It was only when he glanced up at the mantelpiece and saw the spinning gnome that he remembered his dream.

"Had me quite scared for a day or two," he ruminated. "Well, I've burst that bubble. If he had been paying a return visit he would have come tonight." He walked round the room as if to test its complete solidity and freedom from lurking devils. Then he sat down and bowed his head over a book. A warmth from the radiator spread up his legs.

He became aware of a presence as he saw the pages before him darken with a lurid shadow. He turned them over with fearful nonchalance, his ears pricked for the inevitable mocking voice. But into the stillness there dropped only the faint, regular taps of the gnome's hammer. At last he was constrained to raise his head. The Devil stood by the fireplace in the same attitude as before.

"You've never tasted pemmican, have you, old man?"

"No."

"And you've never been alone with ice and snow as far as eye could see?"

"No."

The Devil's smile broadened. "Remember our little agreement, Mr. Primrose?"

Mr. Primrose rubbed his nose, and after a pause mumbled, "Something about being transported. . ."

He looked toward the mantelpiece, but it was gone.

Before his eyes stretched only a vast expanse of snow. The tent beside him was ice-coated. White flakes were being driven into his face. He brushed his smarting eyes with a painful hand. He had just buried someone in a shallow grave. It had been impossible to dig deeply when each movement of his fingers was agony.

The storm was increasing. He fought against it into the tent. There was little comfort here. The heat from the oil stove was very local. One was either burned by it or quite unaffected. A lighted wick swam in a bowl. Despondently he knocked the snow from his eyebrows and sat down. His hands and feet were stabbing with pain; his lungs were congested. The torture of his body sent his mind into whirling, maddening confusion, so that he could only sit marking the slow progress of time.

Perhaps he would go mad before he died. He prayed for release. He felt so utterly dejected and alone.

He did not know how long he sat with monotony beating through his brain, but at last he crept exhausted into his sleeping bag and waited, longed, for death.

The air outside was dark with flying snowflakes. . . .

MR. PRIMROSE raised his head. On the mantelpiece the gnome was spinning. The study was quiet and shadowy. He gave a glad little sob and clutched the desk lovingly. He sat thinking. His mind still ached from the experience which had seared it. He rubbed his nose.

"So that's what he means," he said in a small voice.

He was very subdued when he trotted off to bed. He never wanted anything like that to happen again.

At breakfast the following morning, his sister reprimanded him. "Samuel, you made a fool of yourself before the vicar again last night. You've never been near the Arctic."

He looked up. "Haven't I, though?" he said melodramatically. "Oh, haven't I?"

It was some time before he strayed from the truth again, but the habit was too deep-set to break so suddenly; inevitably he did.

There came to the village a relation of

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the doctor's who had traveled widely. Hitherto Mr. Primrose had been the uncrowned king of armchair adventures, but Mr. Arkus swept all the disciples to himself with an inexhaustible fund of stories. He had fought brigands in China, penetrated Tibetan monasteries, sought orchids in virgin jungles, ruled headhunters in the upper reaches of the Amazon, stirred revolutions in Mexico and driven a dog team across the North-West Territory. Mr. Primrose, fettered by the dread of consequences, sank into a pottering obscurity.

Mr. Arkus was an insignificant looking man with a heavy mustache which overhung his mouth and gave a complacent woofing sound to all his assertions. He had a habit of standing with his back to the fire, his hands, all but the thumbs, sunk in his large jacket pockets. Mr. Primrose had on several occasions visited the doctor's of an evening and been woofed at intolerably.

He could suffer it no longer. He knew himself to be a match for any Arkus. He would cap each story of this fellow's whatever the consequences. The resolution made, he emitted a satisfied "'Ah!" and began to dig determinedly.

The opportunity came when a number of guests had assembled in the doctor's sitting room and were listening respectfully to the doctor's visitor.

"Believe me, gentlemen, I speak from bitter experience," Mr. Arkus was saying, swaying backward and forward on his toes on the hearth, "it's no joke to arrive exhausted and parched at where you expected an oasis and find that you have been chasing a mirage. It's no joke at all, gentlemen."

He paused to make his effect. Mr. Primrose said quietly, "You're quite right, it isn't."

Mr. Arkus's lower jaw sagged. "Do I gather that you know the desert, sir?"

"Intimately," said Mr. Primrose. "But I never thought it worth mentioning before."

Mr. Arkus bridled; his mustache seemed to fluff out suddenly like a porcupine's quills. Mr. Primrose smiled disarmingly and rubbed his face with his hand to conceal his exultation.

Someone, scenting a contest, said, "Let's have your experience, then, Primrose. You've lain low far too long."

Mr. Primrose was only too glad.

He had returned home and was seated in his study smiling to himself over his triumph before he remembered the Devil. A business friend of long standing had that morning sent him a box of cigars and one of these he had lit, and was puffing contentedly. He blew two rings of thick smoke carelessly towards the ceiling. Through the second he could see the lean figure of Mephistopheles standing negligently in his accustomed place.

He laid the cigar in the ash tray and waited, palm pressed before him on the desk.

"Let yourself go a bit tonight, Primrose, old man, didn't you?" said the Devil admiringly.

Mr. Primrose could not deny it.

The Devil put his elbow on the mantelpiece. "What did you think of the Arctic? Amusing, eh? I laughed and laughed. A piece of real, good, clean fun!"

Mr. Primrose summoned the courage to expostulate. "Look here, you can't blame me for what happened tonight. I couldn't let that bounder Arkus get away with his whoppers."

"Oh, come," said the Devil chidingly, "Arkus has been to all these places." He paused, but Mr. Primrose remained silent. "Well, old man, I think it was a desert you mentioned. . . ."

Mr. Primrose suddenly became very hot and very sick. The rays of the sun swinging in the brilliant sky seemed solid and burning. The motion of the camel was acutely disturbing. The dry air scorched his throat and the blazing sand beat up to his painful eyeballs. On all sides was heat—piercing and bludgeoning heat. He had the sensation that he had been traveling across this waste indefinitely.

His clothes, his lungs, were rasping with particles of sand. In the distance, quivering through the haze, were trees, a small drooping group of palms in which lay his hope of salvation. He was lost; his supply of water was exhausted; his body was racked with pain; his tongue was swollen in his mouth. His mind conjured up depressing visions of a skull in the sand, picked clean and bleached.

Then when it seemed that the oasis must be just over the next dune, the camel fell. He was pitched into the sand. He felt it tearing at his face.

His efforts to encourage the beast to rise were unavailing. He commanded, cajoled. At last he stood back and looked at the sun, now low in a brassy sky. He must find water before nightfall! That was urgent. He heard the word singing in his brain—urgent, urgent, urgent. Grasping the water bottle, he began to run toward the

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trees, his feet slipping and sinking in the soft sand, stumbling, falling. Frenzy had seized him. The tears which sprang to his eyes dried on his cheeks.

He ran until his heart was bursting. Always the trees seemed to draw farther back. He pursued them like a maniac. And then suddenly he knew! The truth burned into his brain. There were no trees. He was chasing a mirage. This time when he fell, he lay still, his face in the sand, his nostrils and throat afire with it. . . .

The wind sighed beyond the window. Mr. Primrose stared up at the bookshelves, not understanding for a moment. He was in his own study. He mopped his brow and lay back in the chair breathing heavily.

It was some time before the color returned to his cheeks. His legs, when he rose, felt weak and he leaned his hand tremblingly against the wall all the way to his bedroom. He had been severely shaken.

Doom followed quickly. He was caught in a net, unable to extricate himself. Two days later, Saturday, was a day of ill-omen. When he drew the curtains on rising, he was confronted by dripping trees and a sodden garden. The sky was an unrelieved gray. Soon after breakfast the rain began again, a slashing, hissing downpour which seemed too fierce to last, but which did last. He paraded disconsolately from room to room, and his sister's nagging voice followed him. A day like this, he reflected, never did his sister's temper any good.

IN THE evening, he escaped. There was a room in the Vine and Castle where, on Saturdays, a small group of friends discussed matters of interest over tankards. A vision of a roaring fire and the boys arguing heatedly in the smoke-filled room sprang pleasingly to his mind as he scurried along the shining streets. Climbing the stairs after discarding his waterproof, he was surprised at the absence of shouting and laughter. One voice rose and fell monotonously. Someone evidently had a lot to say.

He opened the door, and his face fell. The insufferable Arkus was woofing at the company. There were subdued but friendly greetings as a place was made for the newcomer. Arkus alone nodded sourly, the nod of a political candidate recognizing a popular heckler.

Mr. Primrose had settled back in his corner and closed his eyes when the speaker said, "But, gentlemen, how many of you have ever been shipwrecked on a desert island?"

There was a pause, and Mr. Primrose opened his eyes. Arkus was looking at him, malignantly, triumphantly. The gleam in his eye was insulting. Mr. Primrose sat up.

Arkus, swaying on his toes, said, "Have you ever been wrecked on a desert island, sir?" The sneer in his final woof was unmistakable.

This was a direct challenge. "Oh, yes," said Mr. Primrose casually. With sudden misgiving, he realized that it was the third lie. He had condemned himself forever.

Arkus, recovering from the shock, said truculently, "But I, sir, was alone on a desert island for twelve months."

It was then that Mr. Primrose had his idea.

He rubbed his face with his hand. "I'm afraid I can't say I was alone," he admitted slowly.

"Ah!" woofed the Arkus.

Mr. Primrose continued meditatively, "I was cast ashore with a film star."

"Indeed. And what film star was that?"

Mr. Primrose beamed. "Claudette Colbert. . . ."

He was tapping his fingers on the study desk and humming when the Devil arrived.

"Ah," he said, "there you are. You're late, you know."

The Devil smiled. "And what did you think of the desert?"

Mr. Primrose genially waved the remark aside. "There's no need to stand on ceremony," he said. "We know each other well enough by now. Take a seat."

The Devil raised his eyebrows but sat down. Mr. Primrose pushed the box of cigars toward him.

"I suppose you know why I've come,'" said the Devil, and moved a cigar backward and forward under his narrow nostrils. "This is the third time. This time I don't bring you back, old man."

"That's right," said Mr. Primrose, and rubbed his hands. "I'll risk that." Finding it impossible to control his features, he beamed unashamedly.

The Devil smiled, and looked at him curiously. "What have you in the parcel?"

"Toothbrush and pajamas, old man," said Mr. Primrose.

There was a pause. "A desert island, wasn't it?" asked Mephistopheles.

"Right," said Mr. Primrose, tucking the parcel under his arm. "Let's go."

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(Continued from page 12)

much as I usually dislike Merritt. All I can say of this issue, is this: you published a very good adventure story, one which was doubtless infinitely better when it was written. Much of what science the author deigned to mention is outmoded, but who cares? At least it was interesting. Only—please, Miss G., *fantasy!* There are too few stories of what I consider fantasy in current circulation; and although I prefer s-f, I still like occasionally to read fantasy. When I want adventure, I'll buy *Adventure Magazine.*

W. Paul Ganley.

119 Ward Road,
North Tonawanda, New York.

LAWRENCE'S COVER GOOD

Of all the stories which have ever appeared in both *Fantastic Novels* and F.F.M., I can't recall any more *gripping* than "The Flying Legion". Few have even approached it in sheer paralyzing interest! Anyone who had read halfway through it, to the point of the escapade over the "Ka'aba", would have believed that most of the sheer adventure was over, except for some action in the city of gold. But the trek across the Arabian desert outshone all the rest!

I wish Lawrence had tried to depict "Nissr". But the point aviation had reached (when the novel was new), was vague enough, what with biplanes, monoplanes, and even triplanes. Some experiments with planes with four wings was done. It is difficult to see how it could be a helicopter and be such a large seaplane. Was it a monoplane or biplane? I never got an adequate picture of it. I wonder if Frank R. Paul could have drawn the thing?

Lawrence seemed to have changed his style with this story. The cover is very good.

Due to the ideals of the period in which G. A. England wrote it, "The Flying Legion" is full of a kind of hysterically patriotic subordination on the part of all members of the "Legion". They long for freedom from everyday life, yet obtain it at the expense of personal freedom under the "Master". They reminded me of a flock of overgrown Boy Scouts. And yet they were rather blood-thirsty; they deemed themselves gentlemen, even scientists, yet wouldn't die in bed if it could be avoided. They seemed to raise ideals of blood and violence to the same place and level that people raised them during World War One; that is, to a point that only a "gentlemanly nation" could lift them.

I used to listen to short-wave broadcasts from Spain, Cuba, etc., and I remember many pieces of music which seem rather appropriate as background music for the six dancing girls, mental views of the various oases, golden minarets on mosques, *et al.*

I once read the Koran through, and I believe I would rather take a chance on a desert over a chance in northern Siberia.

Bob Barnett.

1107 Lyon,
Carthage, Mo.

FANS' REQUEST

We wish to make a request of your wonderful readers concerning three books which we wish to obtain. They are the "Moon Pool", "Conquest of the Moon Pool", and "The Mask of Circe". Any readers having any of these or knowing where we can get them, please write to the address below.

We think that F.N. and F.F.M. are wonderful magazines.

Carolyn Foulk.
Pauline Jamnick.

526 Harrison,
Pueblo, Colorado.

CAN YOU HELP?

Hi; here I am, and you've got a new fan. Your F.N's. are wonderful. It's the first time I ever read novels like that, and I tell you I was thrilled. They are "fantastic". It's just too bad that I will not be able to get any more of them. I found them, yes, I found them in a cafeteria, left on a table. Nobody claimed them so I took them. After reading them, I raced through the twelve book stores of our little town, but no dice, they don't sell them, and I cannot subscribe. Is there another way to get your magazine? If so, will you let me know? We here in Germany do not have those magazines; only some kinds of mysteries and ghost stories, and those are only in books and at a sky-high price, which I cannot afford. Are there some of your readers with a spare or double one? I would be glad to do something in return, anything possible to get some of your magazines. The ones I have are the July and Sept. issues.

Always Fantastically yours,
Carol Schlott.

24 Luitpoldstr.
Hof, Bavaria,
Germany.

WANT BACK ISSUES?

I have just finish the Jan. issue of F.N. and think that it is very good. I was disappointed that the letter column was left out, but pleased at the lengh of the story. G. A. England writes very beautifully at times and rivals even A. Merritt.

I hope you have more England novels on your schedule. How about giving us a future forecast so that we will have some inkling of what is coming? Keep your swell mag at its present level. Also, if any fans are looking for back issues, they should join the *ISFCC.* As Trade Manager, I have several hundred for sale and trade.

Richard Elsberry.

413 East 18th St.,
Minneapolis, Minn.

ENGLAND'S STORY GREAT

Each successive issue of *Fantastic Novels* convinces me all the more of the need for such a publication in the stf-fantasy field. If there

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was no such mag, such great stories as "The Flying Legion" would lie forgotten in the old Munsey magazines, and us younger fans would have no chance to read them. I haven't yet finished "The Flying Legion", but from what I've read of it, it is one of the best fantasy stories yet run in F.N. However, I prefer science-fiction to fantasy, so let's have more stf!!!

This ruckus about the Editor's page—I will now make myself one of the most hated figures in fandom by saying that I'm not for it. It seems to me that if an Editor's page was really needed, one of the longer letters could be removed from the letter section, and the "From The Editor" piece be graduated from a half page to a full one. Since this hasn't been done, it's logical that an Editor's page isn't needed.

I would like to correspond with other teenagers interested in s-f and fantasy.

Read Transgalactic—"King of the Fanzines".

MORTON D. PALEY.
1455 Townsend Ave.,
New York 52, N. Y.

A "LAWRENCE" ADMIRER

How can one describe the indescribable, or express the inexpressible? That was the dilemma that confronted me when I decided to write this letter about George Allan England's "The Flying Legion". I have solved it by deciding not to try. All I will say is that "The Flying Legion" is a magnificent, beautiful classic; a novel of breath-taking scope and imagination; and one which I shall treasure among my top favorite fantasies.

I am happy to see that Lawrence has recaptured his old style of illustration. His line drawings are good—sometimes excellent, as are the ones for "The Greatest Adventure" in F.F.M.—but I much prefer the shading effect. The illustration on page 53 is an admirable example of his talent in this type. The cover is, as might be expected, excellent. Each succeeding painting is better than the last. They belong, not on the covers of magazines (although happy enough am I to see them there!) but on the walls of galleries among the old masters.

The Cummings novel next issue is very welcome. Is this a hint that we may expect the "Golden Atom" stories sometime soon?

Continue choosing novels as good as the last four have been, and you will never hear a complaint from me. If I don't always like the stories in F.N. and F.F.M., at least they never fail to interest me.

ROBERT E. BRINEY.
561 Western Ave. West,
Muskegon, Mich.

WANTS ONLY PURE FANTASY

As another constant reader, I'd like to express my appreciation of F.N., and to urge you to keep it *fantastic!* Adventure fiction has its place, and science-fiction is all right for them as likes it; but putting either within the covers of a fantasy-fiction publication doesn't make

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them fantasy. It only disappoints those of us who love the charm, the beauty and mystery of true fantasy. What's charming, beautiful, or mysterious about the "Second Deluge"? If you ask me, Cosmo had a big head in more ways than one.

With Bing Clark and Bob Barnett, I too heard the "note" they speak of in circa-1920 novels; but to me the irony lies in the recognition of the fact that within twenty years of the writing of novels whose theme was "one man the master of destiny"—the dictator to whom all should submit because of his determination and ability to save such portion of the human race as he saw fit—within twenty years of "Nordenholt's Million" and "The Second Deluge"—we had to cope with dictators in the flesh, and pretty determined they were, and are, too, only not so benevolent as their fictional prototypes. It's too bad the dangerous trend of thinking of those times wasn't seen, before 1939.

Too bad you won't print the C. S. Lewis trilogy, "Out of the Silent Planet", "Perelandra" and "That Hideous Strength." These are really something—they give one to think, besides being fascinating reading.

Here's an idea, if you'd like it: Why not run a reader-contest, on "What is Fantasy?" or something similar, in which the readers could give their ideas of the scope and limits of what constitutes fantasy-writing?

Thanks a lot for F.N., and for allowing me this visit with you.

RUTH ELIZABETH FLETCHER.
R. 2, Bennett Road,
Lowell, Mich.

NO "LOVE INTEREST" NEEDED

It took the atom bomb to give me the courage to admit reading my beloved S-F fantasies. I never wrote to a magazine, but now I jump to it. Maybe this will become a habit.

I write as I am breaking up my collection of prozines including real oldies as I have been a reader (though silent) since 1930. However, I do not wish to sell them (no, not because of the capital gains tax). I am willing to trade them for fan-zines, match cover backs, and playing card backs. Sounds crazy, but every collector is crazy—just a matter of degree. Anyone interested can send a card or send your fan-zines for which I am also willing to pay cash. So write for my list.

Please have every author and editor memorize:

If my public wanted love stories they would buy love story mags. So no more ruined plots or endings just for the love interest. A little love interest should be brought in where it will make the story more realistic without wasting wordage and make the plot more interesting.

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FANTASTIC NOVELS

that we can mail our votes and gripes to for all stories and mags—really impartial so it will be effective? But I shouldn't complain, as I never wrote in before.

Yours for magazines with covers that can be carried by us "old men" without blushing. I don't mean only skimpily dressed girls—but also trash.

The fan club and association set-up seems so mixed up I can't tell what goes on. Of course I never read the letter section until I started collecting fan-zines.

BERNARD TARSHIS.
655 E. Fourteenth St.,
New York 9, N. Y.

BEST COMPANION STORY

Fantastic Novels should feel proud. "The Flying Legion" was the best companion story I've ever read. I shall never forget "The New World Argonauts". Their task was a tremendous one, evoked with responsibility. I have never been thrilled so since "Between Worlds" by Garret Smith.

"The New World Argonauts" pulled through with undoubtable audacity and finally advertized their superiority. Suffice to say a very nice fantastic novel backed with reasonable portraits.

Back to "Between Worlds"—conflict on a colossal scale, was the main reason why I enjoyed the story.

JAMES W. AYERS.
609 1st St.,
Attalla, Ala.

INTERESTING OFFER

It was okay with me to have the very long story, and leave out the letters, etc. Once in a while the variety is excellent.

I liked "The Flying Legion" loads better than "The Golden Blight". I got out the old "Darkness and Dawn" trilogy, and liked them better than either. However—that's just personal taste, and lots of folks would disagree with me.

Would any of the readers be interested in a mint set of "Arabian Nights" translated from the original into French, and then translated into English? There are eight books in the set. Also have 8 or 9 of E. R. B's Mars books for sale. Inquiries with enclosed stamps will receive a prompt reply.

Many fans don't care for prehistoric or end-of-the-world novels. I like them. But I like any well written fantasy.

OLIVE V. WENDLING.
Morocco, Ind.

WONDERFUL ROBBINS STORY

I wish to tell you that your *Fantastic Novels* is a wonderful mag. I have been reading your book about a year. I find that A. Merritt is a very good writer. And G. A. England is great, too.

Tod Robbins wrote a wonderful story, "Liv-

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ing Portrait", one of the best short stories I have ever read. Let's have more of him.

There were a few I didn't like such as:

1. "The Eye of Balamok" was a tiresome story, too long.
2. "Terrible Three" (where was the fantasy in it?)
3. "Purple Sapphire". I didn't see much fantasy to it.

I find that about 80% of stories so far are love, adventure. Please keep stories more fantastic.

Have you any stories of J. S. Bradford? I read "Even a Worm" by him, in F.F.M. It was very good.

I'll always look for *Fantastic Novels.*

WAYNE HUNT.

928 Longmont,
Boise, Idaho.

Editor's Note: We have not run across any more Bradford fantasies. Perhaps some of the readers here or in England know of some, and will write in about them.

SPECIAL REQUEST

After completing my files of F.F.M., I was unlucky enough to have them destroyed, and now find I have to start all over again. But this time very short of cash. If any of your readers have inexpensive copies of F.F.M. for sale, I would appreciate hearing from them.

In your last issue. I found, as you said, the cutting of the letter section was well worth the long version of "The Flying Legion". Only, I hope it doesn't happen too often. Reading the different views of your readers is a pleasant aftermath to reading the story itself.

I'm glad the talk of the Merrittales is at an end—it had such a swell outcome.

Am looking forward this month to reading "The Man Who Mastered Time". It sounds good. But most of your selections are, so I don't worry about having something good to read.

Hoping to hear from your readers,

GUY E. TERWILLEGER, JR.

P. O. Box 387,
Nampa, Idaho.

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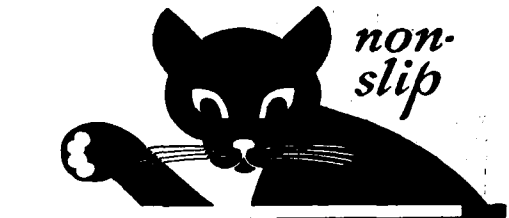
Thanking you, I remain your ardent fan till Eternity calls.

TONY CIMINO.

503 N. Evans Ct.
Scranton,
Penna.



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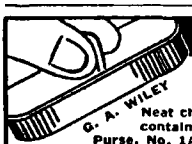

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